

# The Campaign for Ethel Walker Woods

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After a long series of negotiations, The Trust for Public Land, the Town of Simsbury and The Ethel Walker School have reached an agreement that would allow the Town of Simsbury to purchase 424-acres of the school's property as permanently protected open space. Under the terms of the agreement, the school will retain its right to use the property for educational and equestrian uses in perpetuity.

The total cost of the project is \$13.85 million, with the purchase completed in two phases. The Trust for Public Land has committed to raise nearly \$3 million in private donations by February of 2007 in order to close on Phase I of the project in March of 2007. TPL has agreed to take on this extraordinary task because Ethel Walker Woods is one of those remarkable places worth saving from the developer's blueprint. With your generous support we can reach our goal, ensure the permanent protection of the Ethel Walker Woods, and preserve the regionally-significant natural resource, habitat and recreational values of this property.



Photo: Robert Lisak



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## THE FACTS

### LOCATION

Simsbury, CT

### SIZE

424 acres

### NATURAL FEATURES AND CONSERVATION VALUE

- Lies at the heart of more than 1,400 acres of contiguous open space
- Primary recharge area for critical public water supply aquifer
- Exceptional diversity of wildlife habitat
- Extensive trail system ties directly into regional greenway
- Cornerstone of Farmington Valley and Simsbury open space programs
- Protects highly valued scenic vista of Bushy Hill

### CAMPAIGN PARTNERS

The Trust for Public Land  
 Farmington River Watershed Association  
 Keep the Woods (Simsbury)  
 The Ethel Walker School  
 Trout Unlimited

For generations, the 424-acre Ethel Walker property has been integral to the rural charm and rich natural setting of both Simsbury and the Farmington Valley, even as suburban development has steadily encroached. The lush green hills and pasturelands west of Bushy Hill Road offer a haven for hikers, cross country skiers, fisherman, equestrians, and bird watchers, and a natural laboratory for school children. Perhaps more importantly, the scenic vistas conceal an extraordinary treasure of forests and wetlands, where miles of winding paths offer a respite from daily life, where plants and wildlife flourish, and where Simsbury's primary aquifer is replenished with clean water that supplies more than 10,000 people.

At one time characteristic of Hartford's environs, today the bucolic Walker property is a rare gem threatened by the area's rapid development. We have one narrow window of opportunity to act and *permanently* protect these woods and fields. The Trust for Public Land is working with individuals and our partners to secure nearly three million dollars in private donations by February 2007. We ask that you help advance these efforts by being as generous as you can in support of this important conservation project.

### Sources of Project Capital

The Town of Simsbury has committed a total of \$11.1 million dollars for the acquisition of the Ethel Walker Woods property. The total cost to the town will be offset by anticipated State and Federal grants, including \$467,000 in State Open Space grants that have already been awarded to the project.

#### Phase I (335± acres to be acquired in March of 2007)

Town of Simsbury	\$7,000,000
Private Fundraising	\$2,750,000
<b>Total Phase I</b>	<b>\$9,750,000</b>

#### Phase 2 (90± acres to be acquired 2012 - 2014)

Town of Simsbury	\$4,100,000
<b>Total Phase 2</b>	<b>\$4,100,000</b>

**TOTAL PURCHASE PRICE (424± ACRES) \$13,850,000**



The Trust for Public Land conserves land for people to enjoy as parks, gardens and other natural places, ensuring livable communities for generations to come.



The Farmington River Watershed Association has been the guardian and champion of the Farmington River and its watershed since 1953.



Trout Unlimited conserves, protects and restores North America's trout and salmon fisheries and their watersheds.

## Farmington Valley Greenway



While the protection of the Ethel Walker Woods is of great importance locally, its value and significance extend far beyond the borders of Simsbury. The parcel is recognized as the cornerstone in both Simsbury and Farmington Valley open space programs, and connects to the Stratton Brook State Park, Massocoe State Forest, Town Forest Park and numerous other undeveloped private lands. If protected, this addition would create over 1,400 acres of open space for wildlife habitat and recreational purposes.

The existing trails on the property connect with the Farmington River Trail, creating additional hiking and recreational opportunities along the regional 26-mile long Farmington River Greenway. The Ethel Walker Woods would complement these ongoing efforts to protect extensive open space areas, contributing to the quality of life and desirability of communities throughout the Farmington Valley.

*"Protection of this land will provide a significant boost to efforts by the Simsbury Land Trust and others to protect a continuous natural corridor and hiking trail from the center of the town to its ridges and beyond. The extensive network of woods and wetlands at Ethel Walker contributes greatly to the rich mix of geography and habitat that makes this corridor a unique regional treasure."*

Dick Davis  
President of the Simsbury Land Trust

### Scenic and Recreational Values

The pastures and forests of Ethel Walker Woods provide a remarkable backdrop to a highly traveled route through town and resonate as a reminder of Simsbury's rural heritage. This undeveloped area contributes significantly to the unique natural charm of the Farmington Valley, helping make Simsbury and the surrounding region a highly desirable place to live. Additionally, the Ethel Walker Woods contains an extensive trail system that ties directly into the regional greenway, providing both spectacular views across the Farmington River Valley and myriad recreational opportunities for residents. In winter, cross-country skiers enjoy the stillness of wide forested pathways, while in other seasons thousands of visits by hikers, birdwatchers, and fishermen attest to the property's importance as a cherished place in which to experience nature.



Photo: Robert Lisak

### Natural Resource Values

#### Wildlife

With its rich set of forests, wetlands, meadows, streams, and floodplains, the Ethel Walker Woods contains exceptionally diverse wildlife habitat. This includes extensive stands of mature conifers, which support over 60 species of forest-nesting and migratory birds and impressive densities of northerly or higher elevation bird species. According to Hartford's Audubon Society, these northerly species - such as the Blackburnian Warbler and Hermit Thrush - are not found in equivalent numbers in any other area in the lower Farmington Valley. Stratton Brook also supports a native population of Eastern Brook Trout, a coldwater species in decline throughout Connecticut. Protecting Ethel Walker Woods will preserve the ecologically rich habitat upon which these numerous species depend.



The Ethel Walker Woods contains numerous vernal pools, critical to the breeding success of the many reptiles and amphibians that inhabit the property—including the Red-spotted newt shown above. Photo: Dave Galt

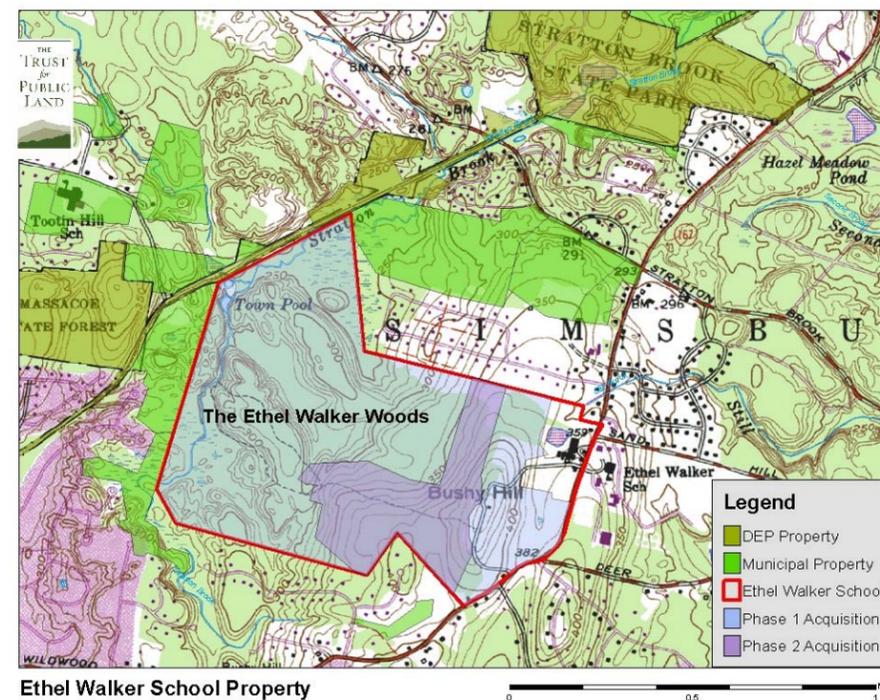
#### Water Resources

In addition to its terrestrial resources, the Ethel Walker Woods boasts equally impressive water resources. The property encompasses the primary recharge area of the invaluable Stratton Brook aquifer. This aquifer yields three million gallons of water per day and supplies drinking water to over 10,000 local residents. Residential development of the area above the aquifer would pose a significant risk to the town's water quality. As a result, the Connecticut Department of Public Health has recommended that the town support the acquisition of open space in this area to permanently safeguard its drinking water supplies.

### Alternative Outcomes

While no credible argument can be made to acquire every piece of open land, there are places in each town that call for protection because they contribute so much more to the fabric of a community as open space than they could as a new subdivision. In Simsbury, the Ethel Walker Woods is just such a place.

For nearly a hundred years, The Ethel Walker School has been a wonderful steward of its land. However, the School's Board of Trustees now finds it necessary to divest this asset in order to meet their fiduciary responsibility. In May 2005, The Ethel Walker School submitted preliminary plans for subdivision of this property to the Simsbury Planning Commission. The plan would create 122 lots on 390 acres of the Ethel Walker Woods, permanently altering the open space qualities of the property. If the land is to be preserved, urgent action is needed. The Town of Simsbury and The Trust for Public Land must raise the funds necessary to complete the agreement, or school officials have stated that they have no option but to pursue development of the property.



Ethel Walker School Property

The acquisition of the Ethel Walker Woods will be completed in two phases, with The Trust for Public Land committing to raise nearly three million dollars in private donations by February 2007 in order to close on Phase 1 in March 2007.