Land Trust to preserve farmland

The organization is raising $368,000 to purchase much of Dennis Silvia's property that's part of Little Creek Preserve.

By Derek Gomes
Staff writer

PORTSMOUTH - Dennis Silvia has witnessed the big changes along Bramans Lane for decades.

From his family's dairy farm with 50 cows and tracts of open space, the street is now home to some large single-family homes with spacious yards.

Silvia built his smaller home there in 1984. It is easily recognizable from the street. Parts of his roof peak up through rounded mounds of grass, leaving the impression his home is actually a hovel.

Through the years, his family has reduced its holdings as the milk farm FARMLAND A5

Farmland

Continued from A3
dried up and the hay fields used to feed the cows were no longer needed.

Despite the sale of much of the land, Silvia's backyard is still more habitat than yard. On the western side of his property, there's a wooden walkway that leads to a dried-out pond. When filled with water, it is home to garter snakes, otters, eels, muskrats and painted turtles, among other wildlife, he said during a tour of his property on Monday. Also in the area is a wooden cottage Silvia built from wood left over from building his home.

The eastern edge of his property abuts the Sakonnet Greenway Trail on the Portsmouth-Middletown line that is protected by the Aquidneck Land Trust. Silvia has toyed with the idea of selling some of his land to residential developers. His 15-plus acres could accommodate a few homes. The problem is his driveway would have to be shared with the other homes. After Realtors looked into selling the property for development, Silvia and the land trust started talking.

The land trust was interested in acquiring and preserving the property for two reasons, according to its executive director, Chuck Allott: It's home to varied wildlife on the western part and could be used for passive recreation on the eastern edge alongside the greenway trail, part of which runs along the perimeter of the Newport National Golf Club.

"It's been on the organization's radar for a long time," Allott said at the site on Monday. "We have a lot of properties we look at all the time."

The land trust is raising $368,000 to purchase much of Silvia's property that is part of Little Creek Preserve.

"The headwaters of Little Creek are located here, as are wetlands, a pond and a natural spring, giving it tremendous land and water conservation values," according to the land trust's newsletter.

Looking south from Silvia's yard, not another home stands in sight. Sifting through old Polaroids on Monday, he showed what the land was like in the 1970s, when there was little in sight in all directions. There were photos of a man posed next to a pig bigger than him; cows grazing in the field; and his home when it was first built.

"I feel good about it," Silvia said about ensuring the land is preserved. "I know that it's getting saved for a little open space."

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