

Trust targeting Little Creek Preserve land

By Derek Gomes

Staff writer

PORTSMOUTH - The Aquidneck Land Trust is raising \$368,000 to purchase 15 acres of Little Creek Preserve.

The nonprofit organization has raised \$25,000, triggering a \$25,000 matching grant from an anonymous donor. A second matching grant is underway. In all, the group has raised just more than \$150,000 toward its goal, according to Executive Director Chuck Allott.

The property abuts a series of trails, called the Sakonnet Greenway Trail, on the Portsmouth-Middletown line that is protected by the land trust.

The preserve is "home to many avian and amphibian species, including wood ducks, barn owls, spring peepers and songbirds," the land trust's newsletter explains. "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."

The area has value for animals that live there as well as humans who might be able to use it for passive recreation, according to Allott.

The land the trust is looking to protect is apparently owned by Dennis C. Silvia, according to Portsmouth's online real estate records. His 15.6-acre undeveloped property has an assessed value of \$312,500.

Allott said the property owner's Realtor contacted the trust first because his client was looking to sell and preferred that the land be preserved.

Founded in 1990, the land trust has conserved 2,552 acres, more than 10 percent of Aquidneck Island. It has other projects ongoing.

It recently finished raising \$2.3 million to buy Spruce Acres, the 23-acre former tree farm also on the Portsmouth-Middletown line. The organization plans to move its headquarters there from its existing offices on Aquidneck Avenue, and use the land for a trail network, public programs, community gardens and microfarms.

The group also joined Portsmouth to buy a parcel on Mount Hope Bay in 2016. The 4-acre site, with all but 1.5 acres underwater, is envisioned to be a public park with water access.

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The Aquidneck Land Trust has raised more than \$150,000 toward its goal of \$368,000 to purchase 15 acres of Little Creek Preserve in Portsmouth.

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The town contributed \$600,000 and the land trust \$300,000 to purchase it. The town owns the site and the land trust holds a conservation easement limiting what can be done there. It was the primary landing spot for the ferry between Portsmouth and Bristol from the late 1600s until the Mount Hope Bridge opened in 1929.

The land trust has to raise the money to purchase

Little Creek Preserve by next May 1. The deadline had been extended.

Allott said the organization finished fundraising for Spruce Acres because it was on its radar first. Now it can focus its energies on Little Creek. It will apply for money from a state Department of Environmental Management open-space grant program.

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