

WITH OPTION, LAND TRUST HAS THREE YEARS TO PURCHASE DAVIS FARM EASEMENT

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Stonington parcel is last undeveloped section along Pawcatuck River

Stonington - The Stonington Land Trust has acquired an option to purchase a conservation easement on 168 acres of the Davis Farm.

The five-year-old nonprofit organization has three years to raise the \$2 million needed for the purchase.

The Davis family and their ancestors have farmed the land for hundreds of years. Before that, it played an important role in colonial and Native American history.

"This is just an amazing piece of property," said land trust President Jim Smith. "And it's a tribute to the Davis family that they are willing to put an easement on it."

The land is comprised of 120 acres on Greenhaven Road that borders the 1,013-acre Barn Island Wildlife Management Area, and 48 acres that is the last piece of undeveloped land along the Pawcatuck River. The rest of the farm is already preserved.

If the land trust eventually purchases the conservation easement, the Davis family would still own the land and be able to farm it but would not be able to develop it. The land trust paid \$60,000 for the three-year option.

"We wanted to make sure we had plenty of time to raise the money," Smith said.

He said the trust began talking to the Davis family about the easement this past summer. While preserving the property has been a priority for the trust over the past few years, Smith said conserving it has been a goal for Stanton Simm, the group's vice president of land acquisition, for the past two decades.

Smith said that the land trust will begin a campaign to raise the \$2 million this spring. He said there are no plans to seek government funding, as the trust will rely on private donations.

"I'm very optimistic at this point we can do it," he said, adding that some donations have come in and several potential large donors have indicated they may be willing to help support the effort.

Smith said the reputation of the Davis family will also be helpful in the fundraising effort.

Smith said that Marion Gilbert has also donated a 3-acre piece of land that borders the 48 acres to the land trust. He said that land contains Indian ceremonial grounds that date back as far as 7,000 years.

With the acquisition of the Davis land, Smith said the trust will have preserved 500 acres of land in town.

"That's a significant amount for an organization that's just a few years old," he said.
"We've been helped by a lot of generous people."