

UConn pitches plan to create sanctuary

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STORRS — The University of Connecticut plans to create a preservation area to compensate for damage done by the now-closed landfill and chemical pits between Celeron Trail and North Hillside Road.

According to UConn Office of Environmental Policy Director Richard Miller, the preservation area will be between North Hillside Road and Hunting Lodge Road.

The area needs the approval of UConn's board of trustees.

The university will own, maintain and guarantee public access to the land under the pending agreement between the university, the state Department of Environmental Protection and the Army Corps of Engineers.

The DEP will ensure compliance. The agreement mandates monthly inspections for 10 years.

The UConn Board of Trustees' committee on building, grounds and the environment voted Tuesday to put the proposal before the full board.

The 64-acre parcel is north of the former UConn landfill. It will connect to Mansfield's Shelter Falls Park and include a known nesting site for great blue herons.

The preservation area includes some land that appeared in the 2000 North Campus Master Plan, but, according to Miller, the slope of the land makes it less than ideal for development.

The university will encourage "passive" recreation such as hiking, as well as research and educational uses of the land, Miller said.

He added the university could build a pavilion to allow for outdoor class meetings.

Miller said his office has already contacted members of the university community for their input on improvements to the land.

Landscape architecture students, for example, will help plan hiking trails and observation decks.

Capping the landfill is one part of the remediation plan. Impervious liners placed over the landfill, Miller said, will prevent rainwater from washing any remaining contaminants into the water supply.

Miller said trenches and stormwater ponds would capture runoff and pump it to the sewage treatment plant.

He added the agreement commits the university to maintain monitoring wells in the area for 30 years to ensure no contaminants reach the water table.

The university plans, according to Miller, to turn the capped landfill into a 600-700 space parking lot.

The agreement will allow the university to maintain its utilities that cross the preservation area, but will restrict other uses.

The size and shape of the land included in the agreement evolved during discussions with the

DEP and Army Corps of Engineers.

The original proposal by the university called for setting aside 40 acres, including 21 acres of wetlands.

UConn responded to an Army Corps request for a larger piece of land by adding 15 acres of wetlands and 6 acres of uplands.

Later, the university added 4 acres to accommodate a DEP request for better public access.

According to Miller's presentation to the board of trustees committee, UConn used the landfill from 1966-1989. The chemical pits, used to dispose of lab chemicals, solvents, herbicides and pesticides, were used from 1966-1987.

According to Miller, the university discontinued use of the site because the negative environmental impacts started to become clear.

In addition to capping the landfill, the university drained and removed contaminated sediment from 3 acres of damaged wetlands.

He said the university replaced the soil with 7,000 cubic yards dug up during the construction of the Mark R. Shenkman Training Center.

Miller said he is excited to make the best of the cleanup situation by turning the site into a resource for the university.

He said he hopes the site will become an environmental education park.