

## **Collaboration and Commitment: A Brief History of Flaherty**

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What we know now as the Dr. John E. Flaherty Field Trial & Management Area is the product of almost eighty years of partnership between the northeast field trial community and the State of Connecticut that began in 1942. As Governor Daniel Malloy noted in his proclamation on the occasion of the Association's 75th anniversary in 2017: "Field trials are an American tradition rooted in competition and conservation; the Association... continues to be a valued ally in the DEEP's mission to protect the lands and natural resources of Connecticut." The grounds, themselves, however, have an even longer relationship with the sport -- the Associated Field Trial Club of Connecticut having made arrangements with the Pelton family to use the grazing area beginning in the 1930s. (The area is still informally remembered as 'Pelton's Pasture' in memory of the the name of its original owners, Baynard O. Pelton and his family.)

The formal relationship between the grounds, the field trial community, and the State would commence in 1942, when the State of Connecticut Fish & Game Department leased the area on an annual basis from the Pelton family at a nominal fee. This relationship continued until 1947 when the Pelton family transferred ownership of the tract to the Fish & Game Department for the magnificent fee of "one dollar and other considerations." Despite the low cost of the transaction itself, there were other contingent fees attached and field trial patrons led by John Tattersall and Dr. John Flaherty volunteered contributions which were used to defray these costs.

1942 was also the year that the New England Futurity staged its first renewal at Flaherty, on the occasion of its seventh running. And with the exception of a two-year hiatus in 1954 and 1955, it has been staged here ever since and regards the Flaherty Field Trial Area as its home.

The next major event to take place that would have lasting, positive impact on the grounds as we know them today took shape in the spring of 1957. In the wake of the spring meeting in 1957, an informal session brought to light that the Fish & Game Department had some limited funds which might be available for the construction of a clubhouse on the area if plans could be coordinated speedily. Action on the part of the trialers was swift and positive. Within ten days, a committee headed by Truman Cowles, with participation by Harry Townshend, L.F. Bissell and others, promptly held a planning meeting: size and construction details were agreed upon, plans and specifications were drawn and in the Department hands within ten days! The Department committed itself to the purchase of the necessary materials and the field trial contingent agreed to supply the labor force. Excavations for the footings and foundation were started in late May. Stanley Bastura, Frank LaMonica, Bruno Longhi, Jack Tattersall and Fred Ertel were the prime members of the committee headed by Truman Cowles. The entire construction of the structure, except for the masonry workers who were hired on successive Saturdays, was performed by field trialers and the clubhouse was ready for occupancy for the fall schedule.

The fall of 1957 also saw the formation of another 'structure' that remains with us today: the Flaherty Field Trial Management Committee. Truman Cowles was elected chairman and Bob Conlin of the Associated Club was the first Secretary/Treasurer with a set of By-Laws and operating rules and regulations drawn up as a basis for procedures. A formal agreement with the State of Connecticut was also drawn-up, conferring official status on the Committee and delegating administration jurisdiction to it.

The improved facilities at the area resulted in an influx of new clubs to use the tract, particularly clubs devoted to trials for individual breeds, mostly under the umbrella of the American Kennel Club (AKC). In the next decade, clubs representing the vast majority of pointing breeds came on the scene: Brittanys, Gordon Setters, Irish Setters, German Shorthairs, Weimaraners and Vizslas. For several years, the Shore Line Retriever Club also ran on these grounds. While some of these clubs have since passed away, the sixteen current member clubs of the Dr. John E. Flaherty Field Trial Clubs Association continue to host 26 to 30 events annually -- ranging from training days, hunt tests, and field trials, as well as several regional championships. The grounds have also hosted a number of

National championships over the years. The grounds are generally in use every weekend from late-March until mid-June and then again from late-August until early-December, the championships generally running over weekdays. Especially during the fall upland bird hunting season, while the State does release several hundred pheasants on the property for hunters, these merely supplement the hundreds of quail released during field trials providing an abundance of game for hunters using the property when events are not taking place.

With such heavy use of the grounds, a high degree of collaboration and cooperation has been necessary between the State and the Flaherty field trial community. Much of this has been possible because of continuity within and long-standing relationships between the two entities. One important element was the reorganization of many State departments in 1971 during the tenure of Governor Thomas Meskill. The Fish & Game Department was conjoined with several other agencies under the new umbrella of the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), the Wildlife Unit forming a member part of that larger group and becoming the point of contact and cooperation with the Association.

These early years of the Flaherty Field Trial Management Committee had proven successful because of the long-term tenure of its original president, Truman Cowles -- after whom the passage across the stream below the clubhouse is still known as 'Truman's Crossing.' Truman stepped down as Chairman in 1982 after twenty-four years in the role; his position then filled by Rich Garini. One of the first successfully completed actions under this new leadership was the necessary drafting of a new set of By-Laws, the adoption of the name Dr. John E. Flaherty Field Trial Clubs Association, Inc, in February, 1983, and their subsequent recognition at the State and federal levels. At that time, the leadership of the Wildlife Unit comprised Assistant Director Peter Bogue, Wildlife Supervisor Paul Rothbart and Mark Clavette as field trial liaison.

Since the early 1980s, the original Pelton's Pasture tract has also slowly grown in size through further acquisitions by the State. The first, and arguably most significant, of these was the acquisition of the 100-acre Dearborn tract to the southeast in 1984; in 1993, another 20 acres was added in the northwest corner of the grounds where one of the Connecticut River valley's ubiquitous shade tobacco barns had stood -- and while the barn was almost-immediately removed, the area is still known as 'Tobacco Row'; in 2002, the State also acquired the 72 acres of the former Gersten property in the northeast corner of the grounds.

The clubhouse, originally built in 1957, has also seen significant improvements to increase the usability and hospitality of the grounds to field trialers and their guests. After a several-month planning and approval process, electricity was supplied to the clubhouse in 1998 largely due to the influence and coordination exercised by Peter Bogue, Assistant Director of the Wildlife Division. One of the original gas lights remains mounted on boards taken from the old tobacco barn and hung in the clubhouse in memory of the good old days and the decades of tradition on the grounds. Since 1998, the following significant upgrades have been made to provide an even more enjoyable experience for field trialers and their guests:

- 1999: the interior was redecorated and new appliances installed in the kitchen area;
- 2004: the clubhouse was expanded to provide a bathroom and additional storage areas and the entire building rewired and re-roofed; the materials financed by the Association and the labor provided by volunteer members;
- 2005: the re-roofing was completed and the bathroom and kitchen area plumbed in;
- 2005: recognizing the approximately \$50,000 in materials and labor donated by the Association and its members, the State invested in a brand-new septic system for the clubhouse;
- 2010: the interior of the clubhouse was completely renovated over a three-month period;
- 2016: a new woodstove was installed, the entire interior of the clubhouse repainted and wood panelling installed to create a warmer, lighter environment for hosting events; the Association also solicited trophies and plaques honoring past championships and participants for display on the new clubhouse shelving;

- 2019: in addition to rehangng all the Bird Dog Foundation plaques honoring past and present members of the Association, the back room was also redecorated with a history wall documenting many of the personalities and their contribution to the significant improvements made to the clubhouse over the decades.

The grounds have also seen significant, and ongoing, improvements to improve both the usability and experience for both field trialers and the larger, general public that also takes advantage of the grounds when events are not in progress. These include:

- 2000: the 24' x 48' pavilion was erected to the northeast of the clubhouse on top of the bluff overlooking a significant portion of the grounds; the area around the clubhouse was re-landscaped and re-seeded, and a new post-and-rail fence installed around it;
- 2003: the stand-alone bird room was approved and constructed adjacent to the clubhouse providing safe, sanitary conditions for housing game birds in conjunction with scheduled events; funding for this came from the Association as a whole and individual member, Bob Fleury, once again the labor being supplied by the Association's membership;
- 2007: with the tremendous support from Assistant Director Paul Rothbart, the State funded the resurfacing of the entrance road from Tromley Road, while the Association purchased the fill and topsoil necessary for the DEP to carry out expanding and regrading the parking area; new lighting for the clubhouse parking area was also provided by the generous donation of Association member, Dave O'Brien;
- 2008: thanks to the generosity of Herb Holden Construction & Trucking of East Windsor, CT, and the support of both the State and the Association, two 48" culverts were replaced on the major loop road to ensure the safe travel of emergency vehicles;
- 2009: the horse barn in the southeast corner of the parking area was re-sided;
- 2015: the process to replace the wooden bridge to the primary designated shooting area northeast of the clubhouse began in the spring -- and which would be completed the following year; a double horse wash stall was completed behind the clubhouse for competitors to clean off the inevitable Flaherty mud from their animals; the woodshed was also begun and would be completed the following spring; the State opted to completely replace all the fencing around the old horse corral;
- 2017: a new prefabricated building was approved and installed next to the bird room to allow for the storage of small grounds equipment and event signage;
- 2018: with the approval of the State, after several months of negotiation beginning late in the previous year between the Association and the utility company that operates and maintains the power lines that pass through the grounds, Eversource completed significant maintenance work and in the process left the grounds with a new parking area over on the Dearborn side, an improved road at the clubhouse and two new, major culverts on the grounds; the Association also installed and repaired over 1300ft of fencing along the roadside edge out on Dearborn and on the boundary with the Coleman Farms subdivision to improve the safety of both dogs and vehicle traffic;
- 2019: the State replaced the gates preventing unauthorized vehicle access on both sides of the grounds -- and spoke with a chronic offender who had been cutting fence over on the Dearborn side and convinced him to desist; the Association also replaced the well tank that supplies water for both the clubhouse and for horses; at its annual meeting, the Association also approved the purchase of a small, multi-purpose tractor for 2020 for its members to assist in the upkeep of the parking lot area for all users' benefit.
- 2020: in conversation with the Association, the State will renew its 10-yr Management Plan for the Flaherty Field Trial Area.

It should also be noted explicitly that Flaherty remains the premier grounds for field trials in the northeast because of the degree of collaboration between the State and the Association. While the State has certain environmental priorities regarding the protection of certain kinds of flora and fauna, many of their other programs focus on the elimination of others. For example, in 1999 in partnership with the the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service, the State provided funding for 50 hours of brontosaurus work on our East and Northern edges which re-

established old field habitat through the removal of numerous maple tree clumps that previously existed; in 2006, the State introduced an additional herbicide program aimed at eradicating the invasive Autumn Olive shrub. These are important to recognize for the simple fact that, in addition to clearing around the Namerick Brook (that flows across the northwest corner of the grounds through the big culvert at Garini's Gulch), these created more usable acreage and, most importantly, made the annual extensive mowing operations that the State is committed to in preparation for the field trial and hunting seasons even more efficient. And while hunters, in particular, also benefit from the mowing operations, these are largely guided by input from the Association.

The Association's commitment to the larger community has been ongoing through a number of long-standing efforts that include:

- Beginning in 1998, the Association's members have provided repeated support for the State's Youth Hunter and Women's Hunting Days by providing well-trained hunting dogs and handlers for what is now known as the State's R3 Program, to 'retain, recruit, and reactivate' licensed hunters to hunt over in the hope that the next generations of sportsmen will appreciate the outdoor experience and facilities that the State provides;
- 2008: in early spring, the Association hosted the annual meeting of the Connecticut Falconers Association. Taking advantage of the updated clubhouse facilities, the Association provided the falconers and guests from the State's Wildlife and Law Enforcement Division with lunch while the group carried out their annual meeting, tested new falconers, and exposed all involved to several species of falcons;
- 2009: the Association supported the State of CT DEP Law Enforcement Division as they sponsored a week-long Hunting Accident Restoration/Investigation seminar and field program attended by 48 game wardens representing 16 states;
- Beginning in 2009, the Association has pledged a year's supply of Purina dog food to the Town of East Windsor K9 unit; this unit is not taxpayer-funded and relies on public donations for support;
- 2010: the Association made a cash donation to the Town of East Windsor Parks and Recreation department for the completion of the new dog park;
- Beginning in 2010, the Association joined the East Windsor Chamber of Commerce (EWCC) in its role as a positive contributor to the local business community through the number of visitors coming to Flaherty; Ed Pontacoloni, Esq., of Updike, Kelly & Spellacy is retained to represent the Association at the EWCC and in all legal matters;
- 2015: the Association participated in the State of Connecticut's Hunting and Fishing Appreciation day by putting on pointing dog demonstrations for almost 1,000 spectators throughout the day;
- Since at least 2017, the Association has also supported the Town Of East Windsor Ambulance Service with an annual cash donation.

The positive working relationship with the State is, as noted in the introduction, the product of long-standing relationships between individuals. For example, Paul Rothbart first served with the State's Wildlife Division since 1983; he finally retired in 2015. Over the course of his long tenure, and as can be seen from the honor roll of Flaherty FTA Presidents below, there are several individuals -- Truman Cowles, Rich Garini, Dr. Jim Moreau, and Rich Murphy -- who have each given over five years of leadership to the Association. One examples of this positive, constructive relationship occurred in 2011 when Assistant Director Paul Rothbart came up with a solution to dissipate the gradually building tension between the Association, the State, and the Coleman Farms subdivision that abuts the southwest corner of the grounds regarding the flow of noise from dogs barking during the course of scheduled, State-permitted parking events. Taking advantage of some severe weather damage to the trees along southern edge of the parking area, the State cleared the damaged area and installed the new, supplemental parking area -- and in doing so was able to eliminate the staking out of dogs and horses along the Coleman Farms boundary -- improving the quality of life for both Association members and participants and the grounds' neighbors. While this compromise worked out perfectly to improve the quality of life for both the Association's members and the grounds' neighbors, the State nevertheless

deserves additional credit for their response to keep the grounds open and accessible during multiple destructive weather events in October that affected the entire state of Connecticut.

One of Director Rothbart's most significant contributions before his retirement was his participation in the two-year process to draft a new Memorandum of Agreement to strengthen the long-time working relationship with the newly-renamed Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) for many years to come. While long-standing relationships between the leadership of both the State and the Association facilitated the 2013 completion of this agreement, it would be amiss not to recognize the additional efforts of Rick Jacobson and Mark Clavette of the DEEP, Association attorney, Ed Pontacoloni, along with Mary Lou Kramer and Melinda Decker at the Office of the Commissioner and Gary D. LeBeau, State Senator, 3rd District for their assistance in bringing this to fruition.

With Paul Rothbart's retirement, the State appointed District Wildlife Biologist Ann Kilpatrick to the Flaherty Field Trial & Management Area in 2016. Ann is responsible for the management of Flaherty and will also act as liaison between the DEEP and the Association. Ann immediately demonstrated her willingness to learn about the unique nature of Flaherty and to meet many of the Association's members by attending several field trials -- and continues to attend and support the State's R3 days at Flaherty, supported in turn by members of the Association. As is obvious from the list of improvements to the grounds listed above, she has proven a supportive ally to both the Association in particular and sportsmen and women as a whole. As we move into 2020, the State and the Association continue to negotiate how to share the invaluable resource that is the Flaherty Field Trial & Management Area, the finest field trial grounds in the northeast.

There is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic hit everyone in some way, shape, or form -- and the Flaherty Association was no exception. As the State recognized the magnitude of the public health challenge facing it, it was forced to revoke the permits for the spring field trial and hunt test season; nevertheless, after the Association drew up a set of proposed event guidelines over the course of the summer, these were approved by the State at the end of July, giving clubs willing to adhere to these guidelines the opportunity to host their already-scheduled events if they wished. The State also upheld their commitment to mow the grounds as usual -- and did an excellent job in the process. While only 10 of the 27 scheduled events for 2020 took place, the clubs found the grounds in excellent condition.

#### Honor Roll of Flaherty FTA Presidents:

Truman Cowles, Chairman, 1958-1982

Rich Garini, 1983-89

Dr. Jim Moreau, 1990-94

Bob Fleury, 1995-96

Rich Garini, 1997-98

Richard Murphy, 1999-2000

Tom Mercier, 2001-2003

Richard Murphy, 2004-2016

Dick Frawley, 2017 - present