



Avalonia Trails

P.O. Box 49
Old Mystic, CT 06372

...preserving natural habitats in southeastern Connecticut by acquiring and protecting lands and by communicating the value of these irreplaceable resources

FALL 2012

Acquisition Celebrations in North Stonington

Celebrations of two new Avalonia acquisitions in North Stonington were held in May. A light rain failed to dampen the spirits of those who participated in the May 5th celebration of Erisman Woodlands. Life-long conservationist Adele Erisman generously donated the 62 acres of woodland surrounding her home to Avalonia, and the house itself to The Nature Conservancy. She will retain a life-interest that will enable her to continue to live in her home, next to the woods that she has loved for so much of her life and which by her gift will be conserved in perpetuity.

On May 19th the sun shone on ceremonies at Parke Memorial Preserve. The preserve was acquired in 2009 as a donation from Pearl Anderson Micheli on behalf of all the descendants of her grandparents,

Aurelia Eunice and Burrows Ripley Parke, in whose honor the preserve is named. The Parke family were well

represented at the event. Parke Memorial Preserve is a former mill site of historical interest and mill artifacts: millstones, turbines and the earthen dam, remain on the site. Avalonia has collaborated with the North Stonington Historical Society to install interpretative signs that illustrate the mill in its heyday.

Additional photos are available on our website and Facebook pages. Volunteers interested in participating in the stewardship of these preserves are encouraged to contact us (see page 2 for info).



Participants at the dedication of Erisman Woodlands, L-R, Kip Taylor, Mac Turner, Marilyn Taylor, Maureen Rust, Bill Ricker (North Stonington Conservation Commission), Pat Turner (Chair of Avalonia's North Stonington Committee), Duncan Schweitzer (Avalonia President).



Parke Pond (also known as Ripley Pond)

Poquetanuck Cove Conservation Action Plan

by Jean Pillo

The Eastern Connecticut Conservation District (ECCD) with funding provided by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) as part of the Long Island Sound Study is working to facilitate the completion of a Conservation Action Plan for Poquetanuck Cove. Poquetanuck Cove is bordered by the Towns of Ledyard and Preston, CT and is the location of the 1.5 acre Poquetanuck Sedge Beds owned by Avalonia. Town representatives and other stakeholders met with conservation professionals from many disciplines on June 28 to begin the process. Avalonia was represented by Directors Anne Roberts Pierson and Anne Nalwalk. In this first of a series of three working group meetings, the participants defined the most important resources of the cove area. Those resources are Natural Communities, Landscape Connectivity, Recreation Opportunities, Water Quality and the Healthy Ecosystem Mosaic.

This meeting will be followed by an August 21 meeting at the Gales Ferry School that will focus on the threats to those resources. Finally, by group consensus, a plan of action strategies will be developed and prioritized to address those resource threats. The Conservation Action Plan model that will be used for this process was developed by The Nature Conservancy. Meeting presentations and summaries can be found on the ECCD website www.ConserveCT.org/eastern under the Current Projects tab. Click on Poquetanuck Cove CAP. For more information or to become involved in the process, contact Jean Pillo at 860-928-4948 or email Jean.Pillo@ConserveCT.org.

Jean Pillo is Watershed Conservation Coordinator for the ECCD.

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President’s Corner

Avalonia Members and Friends: I hope you enjoyed (and are continuing to enjoy) your summer. I want to keep you informed by summarizing the achievements of your hard-working Board since the last newsletter. At the **April** Board of Directors meeting actions included the following;

- Approval of retaining the State Permit for the removal of the Rutan Dam under Avalonia’s name. This saved time and money, and the removal of the dam will be complete by the time you read this.
- Authorization for the North Stonington Town Committee to prepare and submit a grant application to the State of Connecticut for funding to purchase the balance of the Thurman Maine property on Babcock Road. This wooded upland parcel has several vernal pools, is integral to connecting Erisman Woodlands with the Henne Preserve and will make a lovely hiking area.
- A decision to purchase “Directors and Officers Liability” insurance, which will protect our volunteer Officers and Directors
- Authorization to the Stonington Town Committee to work with the USFWS to develop a grant for New England Cottontail habitat restoration on the Peck-Callahan Preserve.
- Authorization to the President to advise the USFWS that, if the Service does want to acquire Sandy Point, it would transfer as a donation. This clarifies the Board-approved motion of 2009 to request USFWS inclusion of Sandy Point within its acquisition boundary. It is hoped that this recognition of the great effort of the USFWS in nesting-bird protection will encourage them to continue their work on Sandy Point beyond the termination of the current agreement in 2014.
- Authorization to the President to sign an agreement with the COMO for the summer of 2012 to allow them to charge a fee for Sandy Point access and to hire stewards for Sandy Point to ensure protection of the habitat and enforcement of regulations.

In **May**, at the Annual Meeting, Officers and Directors were elected. I was honored to be re-elected for a second term as President. We welcomed Rosemarie Huysman as Chair of the Development and Public Relations Committee and Martha Fraenkel as Director-at-Large.

At the following Board of Directors’ meeting in **July** Board decisions included:

- Endorsement of Town and Standing Committee membership for 2012-13. We are still seeking to recruit volunteers to fill long-standing vacancies on several critically important Standing Committees; Acquisition and Stewardship remain the only committees that are fully staffed, and even Stewardship lacks a Chair since Mike Goodwin has indicated that he would prefer not to continue in the interim capacity that he undertook following his predecessor’s resignation. We welcome volunteers in any capacity, especially those interested in Development & Personnel.
- Election of Bob Chapin as Assistant Treasurer as part of a structured succession plan to replace Rowlie Stebbins, who has announced his intention to retire as Treasurer.
- Approval of an *ad hoc* Governance Committee to develop, in collaboration with the Town and Standing Committees, charters to define the roles and responsibilities of those committees.
- Presentation of a draft Strategic Conservation Plan Goals document (more to follow on this very important initiative.)
- Clarification of Avalonia’s contracts and grants process, with respect to signature authority and accountability.

As always please feel free to write to me if you have any questions, comments or recommendations about your land trust.

Thank You

The following 2011 Annual Appeal donations were received after our last newsletter went to print. Many thanks to:

- **Laurel Butler & Chris Daniels**
- **Dana & Sara Hewson**
- **Trillium Garden Club**

Thank you also to the family of

Roxane Simmons

who directed donations in her memory to Avalonia.



*Doe and fawn at Tefftweald. Photo courtesy of Rick Newton
This image is also available on an Avalonia credit card that generates funds for Avalonia. Contact us for details.*

Friends of Avalonia Potluck Gathering

Please join us at **Tefftweald at Bircheturn** Saturday, September 15, 2012 at 3pm for a family friendly event. A Denison Pequotsepos Nature Center Educator/Naturalist will be on hand to guide a hike through this amazing 77 acre preserve, home to abundant wildlife and a beautiful stretch of Wyassup Brook. Kid-friendly activities are also on the agenda!

Please bring your favorite crowd-pleasing dish to share. We will provide assorted soft drinks, ice, paper goods and utensils. When preparing your contribution, please keep food safety in mind as there is no refrigeration available at this site. Feel free to bring a beverage of your choice.

The hike and activities will begin at 3:00pm, with supper served at approximately 4:00pm.

We welcome volunteers to help with setup/breakdown, and children's activities, as well as donations of paper goods and soft drinks. Please contact Rosemarie Huysman at 860-235-2793 or by email at rhuyman@hotmail.com if you are interested in giving us a hand!

Rain Date: Sunday, September 16, 2012, 3pm

RSVP: Not required, but will ensure you are notified in case of postponement. Please email avalonialc@yahoo.com or call 860-884-3500 to let us know you will be joining us! Other Info: Off street parking available, enter at 282 Grindstone Hill Rd., North Stonington. Picnic shelter and a pit latrine are available. Steady rain will cancel.

Bell Cedar Swamp Update *by Janice Parker*

The state-mandated survey of Bell Cedar Swamp has been completed, submitted and is under review. The survey took much longer than anyone anticipated and necessitated much historical research as well and on-the-ground survey work to complete.

Our fundraising efforts are close to achieving the balance of the purchase price (the State grant money awarded covered 50% of the estimated value). Funds were raised by a combination of grants, corporate and individual contributions. If you would like to be a part of this very worthwhile acquisition it's not too late; donations are still needed. You can give online at our website or by check. If you pledged a donation, now is the time to honor your pledge. Thanks!

Water, Water Everywhere? *by Joellen Anderson*

Avalonia's spring 2012, 7 part series co-sponsored with the Groton Public Library and with programs by Groton Utilities and Denison Pequotsepos Nature Center drew over 275 participants.

If you missed this informative, thought-provoking and fun series, or if you would like to learn more, you may wish to read or view various books and videos in support of the current world wide view about the "growing water scarcity that is considered by many to be the most underappreciated global environmental challenge of our time."

For those of us who live near water, it is certainly almost impossible for us to imagine all the people in the world today without access to clean drinking water or water for crops to feed themselves. We turn on our showers, wash our clothes, dishes, etc. without a second thought about how precious each drop of water is to millions of others who do not have this 'water' luxury. A caption on a painting that I saw recently states, "Each drop of water is a kiss from Heaven" and how true this statement must be for millions throughout the globe.

Is water a right like air, or a commodity like oil?

Another issue affecting clean water is the practice of hydrofracturing. "Fracking" is the practice of using technology that employs high volume horizontal fracturing with pressure and chemicals in an effort to release more natural gas. This practice may be responsible for polluting our ground water and some believe it may also be the cause of a series of minor earthquakes near where the fracking is occurring. Become informed about fracking in Connecticut by reading this summary of a July 24, 2012, meeting in New Haven;

www.environmentalheadlines.com/ct/2012/07/25/fracking-in-connecticut-summary-of-july-24-2012-meeting-in-new-haven/



Participants in the "Pond-dipping" component of the well-attended "Water, Water Everywhere ?" series of programs and events.

Photo courtesy of Joellen Anderson.

Notice to North Stonington Members:

The plan of conservation and development for North Stonington is under revision. Please share your vision for the town and your goals for conservation and development with Duncan Schweitzer or Mac Turner. Your voice is needed.

Ecology 101

by *Duncan Schweitzer*

Back in the sixties I attended the University of Maine School of Forestry and Wildlife Management. I had a course in the then-new subject of ecology and we read from the text written by Professor Odum. The concepts of succession, niche, limiting capacity, edge effect, interdependence, and the more popular concept of the “web of nature” were all discussed to the extent of knowledge of the time. Much effort was put into developing mathematical modeling of the energy transfer of an “eco-system”. This continues to intrigue me. Newer topics such as global warming, carbon sequestration and even endangered species were not part of the general discussions back then. (It is now estimated that trees absorb 7 metric tons of CO₂ per acre per year and grasslands take up 2 metric tons).

Over the past year, I have had a chance to recall and even cite some of that early learning as I have discussed Avalonia issues with various folks within Avalonia and elsewhere. Topics have ranged from the place for human priority on the preserves, to the cost of mowing a field, to seeking a definition of what is open space. The ecological system of southeastern Connecticut has one dominant species, humans. Since the ice ages, humans have managed the landscape and the populations of other species to a greater and greater extent. Our mission statement specifies that Avalonia “preserves natural habitats in southeastern Connecticut by acquiring and protecting lands and by communicating the value of these irreplaceable resources.” It is a seemingly clear statement, when it comes to the land management and even acquiring land, questions about definitions, purpose, time frame, and opportunity arise.

Is a natural habitat the condition of the land as acquired? We currently have 1028 acres of wooded wetlands, 1205 acres of upland forest, 155 acres of grassland, 144 acres of saltmarsh and 38 acres on two offshore islands. Each habitat type provides a special niche for species adapted to take advantage of it. Each habitat has its own successional path if undisturbed. Each habitat has its own set of system modifiers that reverse succession or change it in some way.

Should we then do nothing or should we actively manage the land? Should people be allowed to “use” the land and how? Should the ecological succession process be stopped and for what purpose? What overarching goals does the natural habitat serve, carbon sequestration, support of a specific genus or species (including humans), aesthetics, recreation, spiritual value, water and air quality? Who should be making these decisions: donors, scientists, committees of volunteers, governments, lawyers?

Questions about what land should be protected are being explored by our Strategic Conservation Planning Committee, stay tuned for more on that vision. Meanwhile, I would like to hear your thoughts and ideas. If you write in, (USPS or email) we can try to put together a summary of opinions for a later newsletter and to continue the discussion. We welcome your input.

White Cedar Swamp/Dean’s Mill Preserve, Part III

by *RB Jones*

During the '38 hurricane all or most of the trees that were located just the other side of the stone wall marking the boundary between White Cedar Swamp and Dean’s Mill Preserve were blown down. The entire area was cut off and there was a view to the ocean (Latimer Lighthouse)! The present growth, therefore, is about 70 years old. You can see where the trees were cut down and new growth began with many saplings from one stump so now the trees are “split” with at least 2 to 4 trunks where there should be only one.



The stone trough. Photo courtesy of Mike Charnetski.

At the south-east corner of White Cedar Swamp there was a pink granite watering trough approximately 30 inches wide by 7 feet long and 30 inches high. The trough was placed there by the water company when they were building the dam to create the reservoir. At the same time, they also installed the wire fence

that still separates the water company property from White Cedar Swamp. With the installation of the fence, the cattle that had been accustomed to getting water from “Copp’s Stream” no longer had access. Thus, the pink granite trough! The water company installed a metal pipe that pumped water from the reservoir which supplied the trough with a slow, steady stream of water winter and summer. The trough is no longer there (stolen sometime after 1985), but I’m hoping it is in safe keeping somewhere and not broken up into small pieces.

So, come and see what you can see at White Cedar Swamp/Dean’s Mill Preserve on Jerry Browne Road, Stonington (just past the Water Company on the right going towards Olde Mistick Village!)

The first two parts of this series were published in the Winter 2011-2 and Spring 2012 issues of “Avalonia Trails”

Hike across Groton

by *Joellen Anderson*



The rain-delayed Avalonia and Groton Open Space Association co-sponsored 2nd annual 6 mile **Hike across Groton** in support of both National and CT Trails Day was enjoyed by over 30 participants in June. There are many variations for linking state, town and local land trust open space trails throughout Groton as well as southeastern Connecticut, so print out those detailed hiking trail maps, take a picnic and enjoy being outside.

Those Bumps and Holes in the Woods

by Mike Goodwin

Take a look at the forest floor the next time you are in the woods. Is the floor smooth? Or does it look like someone has been digging holes? Unless it was a plowed field, the floor in our woods is often bumpy with holes. Some are the result of soil covering boulders left behind by glaciers. If the ground is marshy or has a high water table the bumps are likely hummocks. These form because tree roots need oxygen and must grow above the ground water. Hummocks form when trees germinate on downed logs, stumps, or raised root systems. The growing tree roots replace the original material creating a root filled hummock. Others may be the work of man but most are natural and due to the wind. This is particularly likely if a hole is beside the bump.

I had the good fortune to be able to spend two days in the woods last summer with Tom Wessels. Tom is the director of the masters program in Conservation Biology at Antioch University of New England and is an expert on reading the forest landscape. His books "Reading the Forested Landscape" and "Forest Forensics" will open your eyes to a whole new way of looking at the woods around you. Much of what follows is based on Tom's tutelage.

Tom calls the bumps and holes "pillows and cradles." Others call them mound and depression or pit and mound features. When a tree is buffeted by high winds it may break part way up, or it may pull its roots from the ground. If the latter happens the soil brought up with the root system leaves a hole or cradle. As the trunk and roots decay over a few decades, a pile of soil is left beside the cradle where the roots decayed. What is left is a pillow beside a depression or cradle.


The pillow is always on the downwind side of the cradle so there is a record of the wind that caused the tree to collapse. Deadfalls collapse in random directions, often in light winds. When trees die and eventually fall, their root systems are decayed and result in small soil disturbance. Rarely, tornadoes will blow down trees in random directions. Otherwise, we can guess the cause and time of year from the direction of fall because the direction is usually consistent by season.

Spring and summer thunderstorm microbursts have winds mostly from the west. If the pillows are generally east of the cradles, NE to SE, look to a thunderstorm as the cause. Trees that fall to the SE to S are likely caused by strong high-pressure gales of fall and winter. Trees that fall to the SW, W, or NW are due to cyclone winds from either a nor'easter or a hurricane. The path of the hurricane affects the direction of the strongest winds. Trees east of the storm center fall to the NW while trees west of center fall to the SW. Only hurricanes cause healthy trees to fall to the NW.

The date of the event can be judged by the age of trees growing on the pillow. Pillows are great germination sites and the opening in the canopy provides lots of sunlight. Trees with small seeds like birches need such litter-free sites to germinate and are quick to take advantage. When you are in the woods take a look at how

the trees growing on the pillows are black birches. Subtract the tree age from the current date and go back another 5 to 10 years to find the date of the storm.

Pillows and cradles last a long time. In thin or sandy soils the pillows are small and erode within a few decades. They may not outlast the decay of the root system. In better soils the pillows and cradles may last hundreds of years and may make it to one thousand years in a well protected site. They are the forest's registry of the past storms it has seen.



Give a little. **HELP A LOT.**

We are happy to report that Avalonia has qualified to receive donations via the **Combined Federal Campaign** in both Connecticut and Rhode Island/Southeast Massachusetts. If you give to the CFC through your workplace, please consider specifying Avalonia as a recipient of your donation. Our recipient number is **51763**.

Avalonia welcomes new and renewing members!



Renew online using your credit card:

www.avalonialandconservancy.org

Click "Donors & Members info"

Or mail this completed form and check to:

**P.O.Box 49
Old Mystic CT 06372**

Name(s).....

Address

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Phone

Choose membership level:	Individual \$25	Family	\$ 45
Pine \$50	Cedar \$100	Maple	\$200
	Life membership	Mighty Oak	\$500
		Organization	\$ 150

I am enclosing \$.....as a contribution in addition to my membership dues.

I want to help: outdoor work fundraising/PR solicit new members

event planning other work (please specify).....

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.....

Note: Dues, gifts of land, securities and other contributions are tax-deductible within the limits of the law.



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Avalonia now has a Facebook page:



Upcoming Events

Saturday September 8, 2p.m. Inspect an Insect. An Inside/Outside Avalonia sponsored educational program at Groton Public Library in collaboration with Denison Pequotsepos Nature Center. Get up close and personal with our creepy crawly neighbors. Learn about insects and their relatives, investigate their features with hand lenses and, weather permitting, we may catch (and return) some of our native insects right outside the library. Please call the Groton Public Library to register. 860-441-6750. Space is limited.

Saturday September 15, 3 p.m. Potluck at Tefftweald. Have you missed the annual potluck? It's back with a new twist! This year we will be hosting it on one of Avalonia's own preserves; Tefftweald at Bircheturn on Grindstone Hill in North Stonington. Bring a dish to share, and your beverage of choice. We will provide soft drinks. See page 3 for additional details. We look forward to seeing you there!

Saturday October 13, 10 a.m. Hike the Henne Memorial Tract of the Shunock River Preserve. Park on Babcock Road near the trailhead. There is also parking off-road for a couple of cars on the north side of Babcock Road and on the Shunock Estates Loop Road (see Henne trail map at our website http://www.avalonialandconservancy.org/files/Henne_map_ver_june112010.pdf) Call leader Mac Turner with any questions: 860 535 1541.

Sunday, October 21, 8-11am: Bird banding on the Knox Preserve with Bob Dewire and Beth Sullivan. Rain cancels.