



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

SPRING 2016

Avalonia Establishes Endowment Fund

As you may have read in the local papers, Avalonia is pleased to announce it has recently established an endowment fund with the investment of \$50,000 through the Community Foundation for Eastern Connecticut (CFECT).

An endowment fund is an investment fund set up by an organization to support future operations. The way the fund works is that withdrawals can be made from the interest upon invested capital to fund ongoing operations or other specified purposes, but the invested principal is conserved. Endowment fund capital is provided by donations which, when the recipient is a registered 501(c)(3) non-profit such as Avalonia, are tax-deductible for donors.

Avalonia has chosen the Community Fund of Southeastern Connecticut (CFECT) to hold and manage its endowment fund. CFECT has a commendable record of fiscal stewardship for non-profit organizations in our area. You can learn more about them at their website: www.cfect.org.

We are excited to be working with CFECT, and with their professional investment firm, both of whom will be managing the endowment fund and providing Avalonia with accounting and record keeping, periodic reporting, and distributions of the funds. The Development Committee hopes to meet with CFECT in the near term to discuss how best to advertise, cultivate and solicit endowment gift as we grow the fund in the coming years.

Avalonia has long wanted to actively demonstrate its commitment to sustainability and conservation in perpetuity by establishing an endowment fund to generate revenue to support its operations. The main impediment to



Adele Erisman, 1909-2014

achieving this goal has been a lack of capital. Since it was founded in 1968, Avalonia has been dependent upon donations from its members to support its activities, and there has generally been little surplus to invest. The capital that finally made creation of an endowment fund possible came from part of a generous bequest made by the late Adele Erisman, which the Board of Directors voted to designate as Endowment Funds. A dedicated conservationist, Mrs. Erisman during her lifetime donated the 62-acre North Stonington property now known as Erisman Woodlands.

Donations to Avalonia's Endowment Fund are held in perpetuity, meaning that the principal is not touched. We hope that this giving option will be especially appealing to members and supporters who want to leave a long-term legacy, either by donations during their lifetime, or by remembering Avalonia in their estate planning. Donors can make contributions to Avalonia to be deposited into the Endowment Fund or directly to CFECT.

by Dick Conant and Janice Parker



Board members meet to establish the endowment fund. Left to right: Claude Pellegrino (Treasurer), Michele Fitzpatrick (President), Alison Woods (CFECT VP&COO), Heather Milardo (Executive Director), Dick Conant (Development).

Annual Report 2014-2015

Our Annual Report for the fiscal year ending May 31, 2015 is completed and can be read on our website. If you would like a print copy, please let us know.

We apologize for the delay in getting this to you, which was a consequence of losing the volunteer who did such an excellent job last year. We welcome volunteers to help with the 2016 issue!

Planned Giving

by Heather Milardo

Would you like to hear more about planned giving options? There are many different ways that you can choose to make planned gifts that can benefit yourself now, your heirs in the future, and Avalonia. If this is something that you would like to learn more about, please feel welcome to call or email our office and we would be more than happy to set up a time to meet with you and discuss some of the possibilities.

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS
2015-2016**

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Michele Fitzpatrick.....President
Dennis Main.....Vice-President
Binti Ackley.....Secretary
Claude Pellegrino.....Treasurer

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Karen Askins
Richard Conant
Scott Dawley
Mike Pernal
Sue Sutherland

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Heather Milardo

HONORARY DIRECTORS

Carole Clark
Anne Nalwalk
Lois Tefft Van Deusen
Hugo Wilms

STANDING COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Acquisition.....Sue Sutherland
Communications.....Janice Parker
Development.....Dick Conant
Finance.....Claude Pellegrino
Governance.....Dennis Main
Personnel.....Dick Conant
Stewardship..... Karen Askins

TOWN COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Griswold.....Dick Conant
Groton.....Vacant
Ledyard.....Karen Askins
Preston.....Margaret Gibson
Stonington.....Beth Sullivan
North Stonington.....Pat Turner

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President's Message

I am thrilled with all of the good news we have to report in this issue! As you will have read on the front page we have finally been able to achieve our goal of establishing an endowment fund. While the starting balance is small relative to our needs as an organization, this is a huge step towards our delivering upon our commitment to conservation in perpetuity.



Standing, left to right: Dennis Main, Dick Conant, Sue Sutherland, Binti Ackley, Mike Pernal. Seated: Heather Milardo, Claude Pellegrino. Not pictured: Karen Askins, Scott Dawley, Michele Fitzpatrick. Photo by John Ackley.

In another enormously significant step towards meeting that commitment, we have delivered our application for accreditation to the Land Trust Accreditation Commission. You can see part of the application documentation in the photo above, but that barely hints at the magnitude of the effort involved in bringing all of the relevant data together. I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to all of you: those who worked so hard on the application itself (including, but not limited to those pictured above), those who kept all of Avalonia's usual functions running smoothly while so much energy was re-directed to meet this goal, and last but not least, YOU, all of our members and supporters, whose volunteer efforts, dues, donations, and boundless enthusiasm make Avalonia what it is: Awesome!

Michele Fitzpatrick

Executive Director's Note

Since the last newsletter, I have been fortunate enough to be able to attend three very interesting seminars at the recent CLCC Annual Conference at Wesleyan University. Of the three, two focused on community engagement.

We at Avalonia constantly try to balance our goal of public education and outreach with our primary mission of preservation and conservation. These ideals go hand and hand, but there is a fine line that we walk to ensure that our outreach efforts complement, rather than overshadow, our conservation efforts. There are many organizations out there that focus on providing environmental education and have the resources to excel in that arena. Avalonia's strength comes from what we are doing on the ground to conserve and maintain the natural spaces that are the classroom for environmental education.

To this end, we have developed and are implementing a strategic conservation plan to continue and build upon the hard work that Avalonia has been doing for 48 years. This focus on acquisition and stewardship means that the work Avalonia has been doing has often gone unacknowledged by the general public. We are now working diligently on increasing public awareness of Avalonia, its mission, and its properties and projects. We do this through public guided hikes, press releases, fundraising events, our website, and social media. We are also working to ensure that the culture at Avalonia is one of inclusion. No matter your age, skills, or background, we invite *everyone* to be a part of Avalonia. We are going places and we need everyone's help to get there. We are a community organization and we want YOU, our community members, to be a part of it.

Heather Milardo

Annual General Meeting

Friday, May 27, 6-9 pm

LaGrua Center, Stonington CT

There will be a business meeting at which we will review our activities for the past year, and the membership will elect the Board of Directors for the coming year. This will be followed by a program that is open to the general public.

Speaker: Ayla Fox

Ayla Fox is a documentary filmmaker from Rhode Island who believes in using film to “communicate the science, policy, and social topics surrounding coastal issues to the public”. She founded her own production company called Shed Light Films and has worked with organizations such as The Nature Conservancy, NOAA, Rhode Island Sea Grant, Sailors for Seas, and The Coastal Resource Center.

We are excited to welcome Ayla to speak with us about her experiences and the knowledge she has gained from her work.

Nominating Committee Update

by Dick Conant

The Nominating Committee has been meeting regularly since December 2015 and is putting the final touches to its recommended Board of Directors election slate for the upcoming year. We hope to present the slate to the Board for its evaluation at the regular monthly board meeting on April 27th, and then it will be presented for a vote at the Avalonia annual meeting on **Friday, May 27**. Remember, the Nominating Committee proposes the slate, the Board evaluates the slate, but it is **YOU**, the membership of Avalonia that actually votes on the slate at the annual meeting... So, come out and vote!

We are also hard at work updating the rosters for all Avalonia Standing Committees and Town Committees, aiming to get all the committees fully staffed (at least 5 volunteers per committee per the Avalonia by-laws) as we start into our new year on June 1st. We also hope to present these updated rosters at the upcoming annual meeting. It is not too late to contact us if you are interested in serving on a committee or know someone who would be a good fit. Please get in touch! We especially need help on Development and Personnel.

See you at the Annual Meeting!



Starflowers photographed by Bruce Fellman

Hike Stonington. This self-guided program is offered by the Town of Stonington recreation department and features a number of Avalonia preserves and trails. More details at our website: <http://avalonialandconservancy.org>



Haley Farm photo provided by CFPA.

Groton's X-Town Trail Hike

by Joellen Anderson

This moderately-paced 5-6 mile hike connects public hiking trails on two state parks, two Town of Groton parks, and property owned by the Groton Open Space Association (GOSA), as well as Avalonia, while hiking across town from Poquonnock River to the Mystic River in Noank. It will involve a small amount of travel along paved roads.

Meet at the Bluff Point State Park Parking lot for registration at 9:30 am on **Saturday, June 4**. A Groton Parks & Recreation bus will meet us at Beebe Pond Park about 1-1:30 pm for our return to Bluff Point parking lot. Heavy rain cancels; there is no scheduled rain date.

Participants are responsible for their own beverages and snacks, as no water available along the way. Toilet facilities are available only at Bluff Point and Haley Farm. No dogs, please.

This event is part of the CFPA CT Trails Days program and is co-sponsored by Avalonia, GOSA and the Town of Groton Parks & Recreation Dept. Registration requested: contact Sidney Van Zandt by phone 860-572-5715 or email svanzandt3@aol.com

Welcome to the Board: Sue Sutherland



We welcome Sue Sutherland, who has joined the Board to fill the vacancy created by the resignation of Bekah Keppel.

Sue has an MBA in Finance from the University of Notre Dame and is a retired finance executive and corporate treasurer for a multi-billion dollar global manufacturing company. She has over 30 years' experience

negotiating financial transactions for sales, debt, foreign exchange, leasing, real estate, insurance, etc.

Since 2007, she has identified, negotiated and teamed with other volunteers and the State to preserve four parcels of land aggregating 660 acres of open space. Other significant properties are in the works to add to greenways in Southeastern Connecticut. Sue greatly enjoys hiking, biking off road, boating, and growing native plants.

Development Update

by Dick Conant

As you will have read on our front page, and perhaps in the local press, we established an endowment through the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut (CFECT) in February 2016. We are very excited about the support this development initiative will provide for Avalonia's ongoing operations!

The Development Committee has also been working with Stonington Town Committee Chair Beth Sullivan, to obtain grant funding to develop an interactive "Hike and Seek" challenge to encourage increased use of our trailed properties, especially by families. For more details, read Beth's article on page 5. The grant proposals also include requests for funding to install viewing platforms and interpretive panels on some of our key properties. We're keeping our fingers crossed as we await word from the granting foundations.

Future Development initiatives will concentrate on identifying and obtaining funding for acquisition projects in all our towns. To that end, Development has begun to work with the Acquisition Committee to develop a strategy for funding future property expansion. If you would like to help, please let us know. We would welcome your help.

Membership Drive

by Heather Milardo

May is Membership Month! Annual memberships expire on May 31st. If you are a Life Member, or have already renewed this year, we thank you and appreciate your ongoing support. If you have not yet renewed, you can use the form provided below, renew online at our website, or wait to receive your renewal information in the mail. Whichever option you choose, you have our thanks in advance.

We are grateful that our members choose to renew each year. Your commitment means a lot to us and your membership dues represent a substantial percentage of our annual operating income. As we continue to increase the amount of open space we conserve our stewardship and maintenance costs increase as well. We would like to challenge each of our members to consider increasing your membership level this year. We understand that that is not always possible and we are appreciative of everyone equally regardless of the level at which they renew. If you do have the ability, though, please know that it will be well used in the coming year. We have several acquisition, stewardship, and outreach programs in the works right now that could use a boost in support.

As a renewal incentive, every member will receive a form that will enable them to offer a one-year introductory membership at no charge to any new member of their choosing. Please share this with a family member or friend of your choice and encourage them to join you in your support of our environment.

Thank You!

Welcome! New and Renewing Members!

Renew online at www.avalonialandconservancy.org or mail this completed form and check to:

P.O. Box 49
Old Mystic CT 06372

Name(s).....

Ad-

dress.....

Town.....State.....Zip.....

Phone(s).....

Email(s).....

Chose membership level

Junior (under 18) \$15

Regular \$25

Family \$100

Supporter \$250

Patron \$500

Life \$1000 (one-time payment)

Organization \$150

Details of the benefits associated with each of these levels of support are available at www.avalonialandconservancy.org/membership/

Coming this Spring: Avalonia HIKE & SEEK

by Beth Sullivan

For over a year now, a number of us have been brainstorming on the best way to develop an educational and interactive project to get kids and families outside and onto the trails. Social media are here to stay, so if you can't beat them, join them! Announcing Avalonia HIKE & SEEK: a self-guided, interactive resource that unites the best of 21st century digital technology with the old-fashioned pleasures of exploring the great outdoors.

Working with website developer, Kent Fuller (who did such a great job on our Avalonia website) we explored a number of different options and have now settled on a format, process and procedure for this initiative and we are hoping we will be ready to launch for this spring hiking season.

Avalonia HIKE & SEEK features preserves in all of Avalonia's corners of SE CT. We have gone out on all the trails, taken photos and made lists of "Targets": features that are goals for participants to find. We will offer some educational insight into the clues in order to encourage a little deeper thought about nature and the habitats on the preserve.

Participants will start from a HIKE & SEEK home page that will outline the adventure and describe how to proceed. We will request an online registration to get an idea of participation, and so we can acknowledge participants who complete the challenge. They can research each preserve and read associated blogs and download maps from the web pages for that preserve. The goals and targets will be natural features, objects, or views that are readily identifiable and can be photographed, together with trail head signs to document the preserve location of each feature.

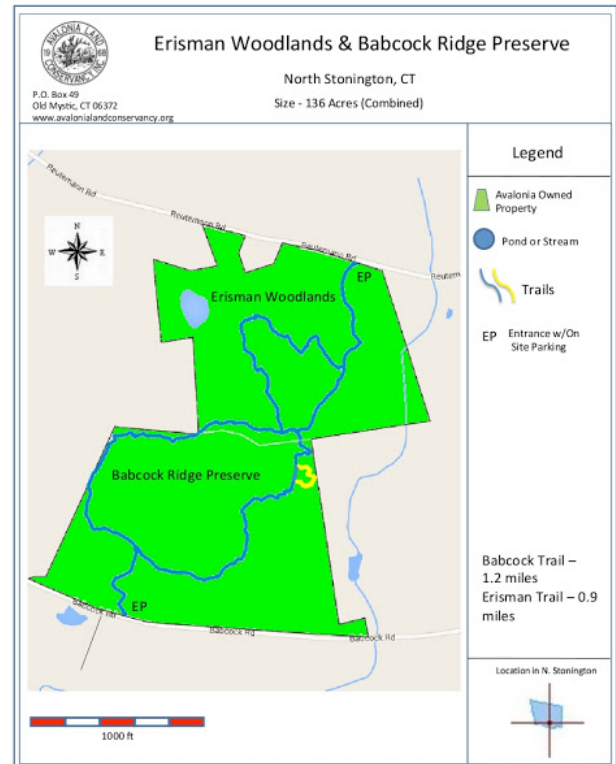
At the end of the season we will contact everyone and hold a celebration for one and all. We are applying for grants and donations, not only to cover the development costs of this initiative, but also to purchase commemorative Avalonia HIKE & SEEK hats for all participants.

Kent is working on a dedicated web page for the activity and it will be linked with our Avalonia Facebook page, where participants will be able to post their findings, photos, and adventures. I can interact with participants as well and answer questions and offer encouragement! Participants can use Instagram as well to post more photos.

So, we get kids, and families, out onto the preserves, hiking and exploring, but encourage them to use their phones and cameras to document their progress and post to a social media site to interact with others. Can't beat that!

Look for an announcement as we get closer to launching. It will be on our website as soon as we are up and running, or send your email address to newsletter@avalonialc.org to get a personal announcement to your email inbox. Then we expect YOU and your kids to be off and hiking!

Babcock Ridge Dedication *by Janice Parker*



We completed the acquisition of this beautiful property last spring. Now we have signs and trails in place and are ready to proudly introduce it to the Avalonia membership. Join us for the dedication of Babcock Ridge, **Saturday, May 14 at 10am**, rain or shine, at the entrance at 113 Babcock Road. Formalities will be minimal, and light refreshments will be served. There will be ample opportunity to explore the newly installed trails, which connect with those on the popular Henne and Erisman preserves. See Bruce Fellman's description of his Trails Days hike below, for more details of what you are likely to see.

Nature Hike Henne Preserve & Babcock Ridge

led by Bruce Fellman

This guided hike is a Connecticut Forest and Parks Association Trails Days event that packs a lot of habitat diversity into a small and easily walkable distance. We'll start with a great circle trek of the rugged valleys and slopes of Babcock Ridge, where we will look for vernal pools, pileated woodpeckers, worm-eating warblers, glacier-carved boulders, and possibly tree-climbing black rat snakes. We'll follow with a more gentle walk through the Henne Preserve, with its beaver-created wetlands, nesting osprey and great blue heron, tree swallows, ducks, turtles and possibly nesting red-headed woodpeckers. Bruce will highlight the abundant plants and animals and help with photography. Bring binoculars, cameras, magnifying glasses, and field guides.

Meet **Saturday, June 4 at 10am** at the small parking area at 113 Babcock Road, North Stonington. Rain date Sunday, June 5 at 10:30am.



AVALONIA LAND CONSERVANCY. INC.

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

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Avalonia has a Facebook page:



- Read our weekly blog “AvaloniaEtrails” for updates between newsletter issues:
<http://avaloniaetrails.blogspot.com>
- Submit your email address to newsletter@avalonialc.org to receive our e-newsletter “Avalonia Now!” and notifications of impromptu events.



Upcoming Events

Saturday, May 14. Babcock Ridge Dedication. Come celebrate with us the acquisition of this beautiful property. Details on page 5.

Friday, May 27. Annual General Meeting. Details on page 4.

Saturday June 4. Connecticut Forests & Parks Association Trails Days. Details on page 3.

Groton X-town Hike. Details on page 3.

Babcock Ridge/Henne Preserve Guided Nature Hike. Details on page 5.

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