



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

WINTER 2016-2017

Celebrate the New Year and Our New Acquisitions!

by Sue Sutherland

Exceptional donations and a key transfer highlighted Avalonia's fall acquisition activities. Mimi and Brad Borden deserve special thanks for their generosity, which ensured that 94 acres of their spectacular and ecologically significant land in North Stonington remains forever in a natural state as the "Benedict Benson Preserve."



Cerulean Warbler, photographed by Niall Doherty.

It is home to Cerulean Warblers, a small sky-blue bird which is, according to the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, "one of the species of highest concern in the eastern United States." Watch for the announcement of the opening ceremony and introductory guided hikes.

Also in North Stonington, The Nature Conservancy transferred 79 acres adjoining Avalonia's Bell Cedar Swamp to Avalonia, creating almost 140 acres of varied habitats. A beautiful trail starting on Boom Bridge Road winds through forests with rocky ridges and meadows to a glacial area bordering the Cedar Swamp where you can see the globally rare Atlantic white cedar forest.



Fresh snowfall on the trail at the new addition to the Bell Cedar Preserve, photographed by Bruce Fellman

Our third acquisition is a 6 acre meadow on Shewville Road in Ledyard donated by William Forsberg, called the Samuel Lamb and Forsberg Preserve. Adjoining Town open space, it is bordered by Williams Brook and is an environmentally rich mix of ferns, native berry shrubs, and wildflowers. The Connecticut-listed Blue-winged Warbler may often be heard there.

It is Avalonia's privilege to work diligently to evaluate new land donations and purchases. The current Acquisition Committee team includes one of Avalonia's former Presidents, other former and current Board members, and many community volunteers. In the next newsletter we will describe more about our committee and how we hear about and select properties for conservation, using the Land Trust Alliance's rigorous screening process. The Avalonia Board is involved at every step in this fun, fast-paced, and exciting process as we further the Avalonia mission to preserve natural habitats in southeastern Connecticut.

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS
2016-2017**

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Dennis Main.....President
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Richard Conant
Scott Dawley
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Mike Pernal

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Heather Milardo

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Acquisition.....Sue Sutherland
Communications.....Michele Fitzpatrick, Janice Parker
Development.....Dick Conant
Finance.....Sue Sutherland
Governance.....Mike Pernal
Personnel.....Dick Conant
Stewardship..... Karen Askins

TOWN COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Griswold.....Dick Conant
Groton.....Michele Fitzpatrick
Ledyard.....Karen Askins
Preston.....Bob Chapin, Margaret Gibson
Stonington.....Beth Sullivan
North Stonington.....Pat Turner

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President's Update

Happy New Year to our Avalonia Family: Members, Friends, and Supporters!!!! It has been a very successful and exciting year for Avalonia and we look forward to a New Year that continues this success.

We have added more than 5% (179 acres) to our protected preserves which now total over 3,500 acres in our southeastern CT mission area. This recent addition of roughly \$1,000,000 value of property was through the extremely generous land gifts from donors whom we look forward to honoring at our Avalonia Annual Meeting June 22, 2017. Please read Acquisition Chair Sue Sutherland's article on our new properties (page 1).

On the Accreditation front, your current Board has done yeoman service in completing the work necessary for our Accreditation application to be in the pipeline for approval. Accreditation announcements are due in February 2017. Although our Accreditation application is moving forward it is not the end of the journey. Re-accreditation happens every five (5) years, and the current Board is engaged in the continual review and revision of Avalonia Governance documents. Under the guidance of Chair Mike Pernal, the Governance Committee is currently reviewing and updating Town and various Standing Committee Charters as appropriate. Improvements to our By-laws are currently being reviewed for their efficacy, with the Board already approving an amendment to bring our Fiscal Year into line with the Calendar Year which will greatly simplify our budgeting, accounting and reporting efforts. The Board has also approved changes to enhance our cash management and internal controls under the direction of Finance Committee Chair and Treasurer Sue Sutherland.

Under the leadership of Stewardship Chair Karen Askins, a new Stewardship manual has been authored and printed for ongoing distribution. It will soon be available on our website for our many volunteer stewards to access. This will augment the many Avalonia Policy and Procedure enhancements that have been made as a result of the recent Land Trust Alliance accreditation Standards and Practices reviews.

Development Committee Chair Richard Conant has been heading up our fundraising planning and implementation efforts for planned upcoming multi-million capital campaign to fund acquisition and stewardship of additional "wow" properties that have been identified. (See article on page 4). Property owner requests for Avalonia to preserve their land and the soft real estate market have provided a number of environmentally valuable properties which qualify for possible acquisition.

Please see additional articles on our Annual Appeal that Executive Director Heather Milardo has underway (page 4). The Annual Appeal is the backbone of funding for our ongoing operations. Our Endowment Fund has nearly doubled in the past year thanks to significant one-time donations and these generous donors will be honored at our Annual Meeting next June. Other greatly appreciated one-time gifts and challenge grants, including Board

raised pledges, have also enabled the perpetual stewardship costs of current year acquisitions to be fully funded within the current year, making Avalonia history!!

On February 21, 2017, Avalonia marks the completion of 49 years of fulfilling its mission. As we embark on the 50th year, we acknowledge all our tremendous donors, members, volunteers, staff and other supporters who have brought us to this point. Our 50th Anniversary Committee will be working to coordinate a full and diverse calendar of celebratory events as we mark this momentous milestone. Please put June 22, 2017, on your calendar for the Annual Meeting to celebrate with us!!

Dennis S. Main

Executive Director's Report

Happy New Year! The beginning of a new year is always an exciting time. Avalonia is looking forward to an amazing year filled with member get-togethers, new property acquisitions, hikes, guest speakers, and more.

Please make Avalonia a part of your New Year! If your resolutions include getting more exercise, our preserves are open dawn to dusk every day, and are much cheaper than a gym membership. Spend quality family time exploring via Avalonia Hike & Seek. We offer guided hikes, too. Check out page 6 for current offerings, and make sure we have your current e-mail address, so we can notify you of impromptu events. Join us for food, fellowship, and fun at our March Winter gathering (details below). And of course, plan to join us for our Annual Membership Meeting on June 22, so you can not only meet your fellow members, but also cast your vote for the candidates who will promote *your* vision for *your* Avalonia!

Lucia M. Mardo

Join us for our **Winter Gathering!**

Friday, March 10, 2017

Social hour 5:30 pm Dinner 6:00 pm Program 7:00 pm

Mystic Congregational Church

**43 East Main Street
Mystic, CT**

Program: "Edible Wild Plants in and Around Southeastern CT"

by Russ Cohen, expert forager and author of

Wild Plants I Have Known... and Eaten

Potluck dinner: if your last name begins with...

A-K: Please bring a salad or appetizer to share

L-P: Please bring a dessert to share

Q-Z: Please bring a main dish to share

Beverages, paper products, and utensils will be provided

Festivities will include door prizes, a silent auction, and the ever-popular basket auction.

**If you have any questions or would like to donate items for auction,
please contact the office: 860-884-3500, avalonialc@yahoo.com**

This is a family night for members, friends, and potential new members. Winter blues? Cabin fever? Share a meal and good fellowship and discover something new of the world around us.

Annual Appeal

by Heather Milardo

Thank you to everyone who contributed to the Annual Appeal. Your generosity helped Avalonia raise \$13,334. Your support is vital to Avalonia's programs and we are so grateful that you have chosen to contribute to its success through a year-end donation.



Paffard Woods.

Photo by Beth Sullivan

Personnel Committee Report

by Dick Conant

The Avalonia Personnel Committee, comprising Dick Conant, Kassie White, Mike Pernal, Heather Milardo, and Dennis Main, has been actively searching for Avalonia members who would be willing to serve on this coming year's Nominating Committee. The Personnel Committee will meet in January to prepare a recommended roster of Nominating committee members for the Board of Directors to review and vote on at the January 25, 2017, Board meeting; however, the Board can always consider additions even after the January meeting. Nominating Committee typically meets monthly through the winter and spring to develop a slate of candidates prior to the Avalonia annual meeting and is always looking for Avalonia members that would be willing to serve on the Board.

Additionally, the Personnel Committee is on the look-out for any Avalonia members who would like to serve on either a Standing or Town Committee. The special need at the moment is to increase participation in the Personnel and Development Committees. Please contact Dick Conant on any personnel matters and if you are not currently involved in Avalonia governance make a New Year's resolution to dive on in!

Stewardship Committee Report

by Karen Askins and Beth Sullivan

While acquisition and conservation remain the main arms of our mission, conservation cannot happen without stewardship and stewardship cannot happen without our dedicated but small army of volunteers. Every single property under the protective Avalonia umbrella needs stewardship from the very start. Walking the boundaries with deed and map, and posting them accurately is the first step. Developing a management plan comes next. That requires assessment of the land, habitats, vegetation and includes any plans for trails, invasive plant management, and areas to be protected. Creation of trails: laying out and mapping and then actually making them, taking into consideration slope, accessibility, erosion potential, wetlands, scenic value and so much more... take a lot of thought and time and labor.

Carrying out the plan over the long term is our ongoing stewardship responsibility.

In an effort to recruit and engage stewards, we try reaching out to the neighbors of any new preserves, to be watchdogs. Neighbors also have an interest in maintenance and appearance of preserves in their neighborhood. They can be our eyes and ears and arms and legs! Often members volunteer their services for general stewardship and need some introduction to the tasks where they can be of great value.

ENTER: Our new Stewardship Manual. Over the last several months, the stewardship committee, led by chair Karen Askins, developed a plan and "wrote the book" on Stewardship for Avalonia. This comprehensive volume tackles all sorts of stewardship, from boundary walks, trail maintenance, encroachments, equipment safety and monitoring of conservation easements. In the next months, our website will again be enhanced by adding a dedicated stewardship site. A main link will be to a pdf version of the manual that everyone can access, as well as to the policies Avalonia has adopted to guide our stewardship efforts. Although this site will primarily be for stewards, it will also give all members an idea of what our efforts are all about.

Stewardship is the bedrock of our efforts: ongoing and in perpetuity. Having a dedicated stewardship site with policies, procedures, management plans and the manual will make sure we are all on the same page, and also assure the torch is properly passed from one steward to another as time passes.

Member Open House

by Heather Milardo

Beginning February 7th, Avalonia will be holding a monthly "Open House" in the office on the first Tuesday of each month. This is a great time for anyone to stop by the office and have the opportunity to chat about any questions or concerns they may have or even just to pop in and see where we are and what we're doing. No need to call ahead, just stop by between 10am and 2 pm, have a cup of coffee or tea, and talk. Our office is located at 6 Hatch Street. We'd love to see you!

Development Committee Report

by Dick Conant

These are exciting times in the Avalonia fundraising world. We are well into our annual appeal and we are on track for another good year with \$ 13,334 received to date. As always, Avalonia depends on its member's consistent and generous donations to the annual appeal and, as usual, you have not let us down.

Avalonia is also about half way through its second fundraising challenge. You may recall that we successfully met the first \$10,000 challenge in 2016. Now the same generous donor has renewed his offer to match funds raised, but has upped the stakes, raising the challenge to \$20,000 to be raised by December 31, 2017. A first appeal has already been sent to a subset of our membership, and at the November Board of Directors meeting our president, Dennis Main challenged the entire board to commit personally to donating to the Challenge grant, specifically to raise the stewardship funds that will be required after Avalonia receives its expected Land Trust Alliance (LTA) accreditation in February. The good news is that with donations and pledges to date, we are approaching the \$10,000 half-way mark...You all can figure out the bad news, we still need to raise another \$10,000 plus to meet the challenge and receive the matching \$20,000. Please dig deep as this year progresses and help Avalonia meet this challenge successfully.

So, you might ask or wonder, why the need for all this fundraising and where is it all going? Avalonia has recently been and continues to be in maybe its most dynamic period of its almost 50-year existence. With accreditation expected in February 2017, we will achieve a new level of professional organizational structure and control. Although accreditation will put Avalonia on a much higher land conservancy plane, it comes with a monetary impact; the need to secure funds for perpetual stewardship costs and to protect Avalonia from liability. And, of course, there is the reinvigorated land acquisition agenda that Sue Sutherland is heading up with the potential purchase of key major land parcels over the next few years. So, to paraphrase Zero Mostel's character in Mel Brook's *The Producers*... "Can't produce land conservation without money!" That being said the Avalonia Board of Directors, the Executive Director and all of Avalonia governance remain very grateful for the continue support from all of you, our members.



Robin.

Photo by Beth Sullivan.

2017 Challenge Grant

by Heather Milardo

In our last fiscal year we were most fortunate to be challenged by a generous supporter to raise \$10,000 for our Bedrock Fund for Land Acquisition, which he would match. You, our generous donors and supporters, rose to the challenge, and we met our goal!

Now, our generous benefactor has offered to double last year's challenge: If Avalonia can raise \$20,000, he will donate an additional \$20,000. To date, we have received \$7,115.

We have until **December 2017** to raise the remaining \$12,885. We count on your support to make that happen!

You may be able to double your contribution at no additional cost to yourself; check if your employer has a matching gift program.



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).....

Address.....

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/

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



AVALONIA LAND CONSERVANCY. INC.

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

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Mystic, CT

Permit No. 126

Avalonia has a Facebook page:



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



Upcoming Events

Tuesday, February 7, 10am-12noon. Member Open House. See page 4 for details.

Saturday, February 11am. “Hometown Habitat: Stories of Bringing Nature Home”. Mystic & Noank Public Library. This free screening of a 90 minute movie about landscaping for habitat value is sponsored by the Connecticut College Arboretum and Wild Ones.

Friday, March 10, 5:30pm. Winter Gathering. Join us for good fellowship, good fun, and good food! Bring your friends! Details on page 3.

Saturday, April 22, 10am. Guided walk through Benedict Benson Preserve, with naturalist Bruce Fellman.

Thursday, June 22. Annual Membership Meeting. Save the date!

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www.avalonialandconservancy.org