

AVALONIA LAND CONSERVANCY, Inc.  
P.O. Box 49,  
Old Mystic, CT 06372

# Sandy Point Nature Preserve

## Property Management Plan

Little Narragansett Bay  
Stonington, Connecticut & Westerly, Rhode Island

Stonington Town Committee is responsible



fo

r the stewardship of this property

Plan Prepared by:  
Richard Newton & Beth Sullivan  
Fall 2015

Approved by Stonington Town Committee: \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Approved by Stewardship Committee: \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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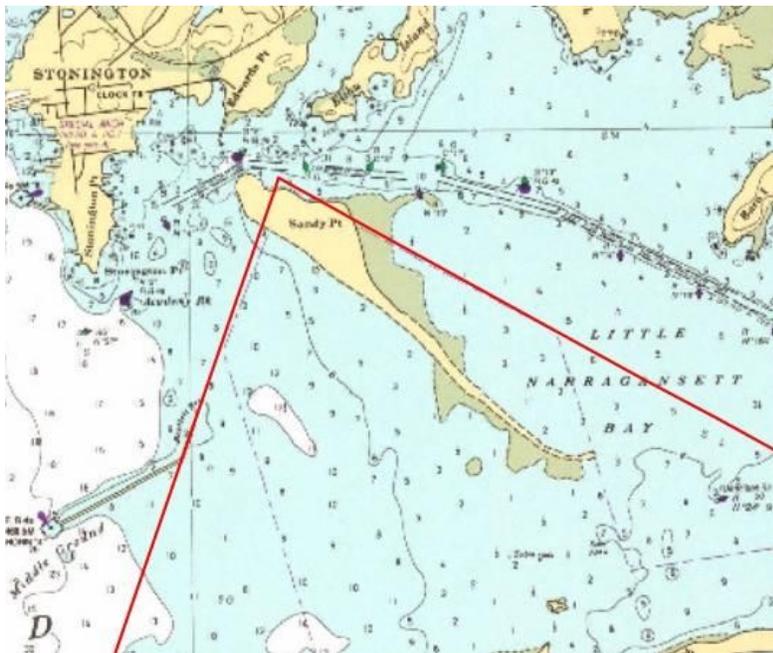
SUMMARY

This plan is one property in Little Narragansett Bay between Stonington, CT and Watch Hill, RI. It is a barrier island. Access is from the water. See the photos and map that follow. Visitors are welcome, but a landing permit is required.

Property is owned by Avalonia Land Conservancy, Inc., P.O. Box 49, Old Mystic, CT 06372. Avalonia Land Conservancy (ALC) can be reached by email at [avalonialc@yahoo.com](mailto:avalonialc@yahoo.com), by



phone at 860-884-3500, and has a websi



te at

<http://www.avalonialandconservancy.org>.

## HISTORY

The Sandy Point Nature Preserve is located in the Towns of Stonington, CT and Westerly, RI. Little Narragansett Bay and Fishers Island Sound surround the property. Roughly 90% of the property is in Westerly, RI.

## SITE INFORMATION

### The property

A map of the property from CT DEEP marine regulations is shown to the left. The property is identified as Map/Book/Lot/Unit 78/3/1 in the Stonington GIS system and # 11744 in the Westerly GIS system. GIS acreage is roughly 40 acres. The red line is the state boundary.

### Acquisition history

Donation from Alfred H. Gildersleeve Jr., Richard O. Gildersleeve and Judith Gildersleeve DuPont to the Mashantucket Land Trust in August 1982.

Mashantucket Land Trust was renamed Avalonia Land Conservancy, Inc. in September 1995.

### Land use history

The land is a barrier island and was donated on the condition that it is used primarily as a nature preserve. (Note: in photo below, 1934 photo was not available. Photo on left is from 1990). At one time Sandy Point was connected to Napatree Point. As a barrier island, it moves and migrates due to storms and tides.

### Public use resources

This property provides public coastal access as long as that access does not interfere with the nature preserve aspect intended by the donors. Access is only by water.

Historically, Avalonia has partnered with the Stonington COMO in selling landing and usage permits, however that relationship is under review. In 2009 Avalonia and the US Fish and Wildlife Service entered into a partnership to better protect the birds using the island for

breeding grounds and migratory stopovers. That partnership has evolved to have the island accepted into the refuge boundary of the Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge. Management is now by the Rhode Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex in Charlestown Rhode Island under a 10-year lease. While Avalonia retains full ownership of the island, as desired by the donors, it will be properly managed as a nature preserve, with biologists to observe, survey and assess the wildlife. Recreational usage will still be encouraged. The USFWS stewards will also provide visitor services such as informational and interpretive signage and environmental education. By doing this, they can engage the public's cooperation in their efforts. They will also have the ability to enforce the rules.

Public benefit of the protected property:

The property falls within a CT DEEP Natural Diversity Database and is a nesting site for endangered birds.

The property is a significant natural area that qualifies as being preserved for a "conservation purpose" under 26 US Code 170(h)(4):

(4) Conservation purpose defined

(A) In general

For purposes of this subsection, the term "conservation purpose" means—

(i) the preservation of land areas for outdoor recreation by, or the education of, the general public,

(ii) the protection of a relatively natural habitat of fish, wildlife, or plants, or similar ecosystem,

(iii) the preservation of open space (including farmland and forest land) where such preservation is—

(I) for the scenic enjoyment of the general public, or

(II) pursuant to a clearly delineated Federal, State, or local governmental conservation policy,

and will yield a significant public benefit, or

(iv) the preservation of an historically important land area or a certified historic structure.

### Natural resources

The parcel is open to the public as are all Avalonia properties. During breeding season, some portions of the island are temporarily closed to the public with ropes and signs to protect nesting birds such as Piping Plover, American Oystercatcher, and Least Terns. Access is by water only.

The island contains several subtly different habitats. The higher grassy and shrubby dune areas are nesting areas for Herring and Black Backed Gulls that have become a problem and threat to the other ground nesting birds. Canada Geese and Mallards also nest in the grasses. The lower, flatter sand and gravel wash over areas provide nesting sites for American Oystercatchers and Piping Plovers as well as occasionally hosting a variable population of nesting Least Terns. These last two species are listed as Threatened or Endangered Species in both states and federally. Red Knots, a shorebird, migrate through the area and are federally listed as a

## Threatened Species.

The island's sandy shallow shoreline is also a significant nesting area for Horseshoe Crabs. Studies have been conducted since 2008 to monitor numbers with DEEP and tag the crabs with Project Limulus from Sacred Heart University. There are numerous other species that depend on the HSC life cycle, such as fish and invertebrates that are symbiotic with the Horseshoe Crabs and their nests, as well as migrating shore birds, including the Red Knot that stage on the island and feed on HSC eggs.

There are also populations of locally rare sand plain plants as well as a healthy population of American Beach Grass. Over the decades there have been efforts to restore beach grass after significant storm or dredging events. It has become established that the greatest value nesting areas are low flat open sand expanses.

Potential threats to conservation values: Sea level rise and storms with greater wave action and surges pose the greatest long-term threat. The areas are washed out and if storms occur during nesting season, entire generations of birds are wiped out and valuable nesting areas are eliminated. The over-population by Gulls also poses a significant problem to the safety and success of nesting shore birds. The Gulls are major predators of eggs and nestlings.

Over use and abuse by the public also poses a threat. Human activity within nesting and feeding areas, kite flying, fireworks, litter, dogs and general usage, is a deterrent to successful nesting and fledging. Public compliance with restricted areas and attention to educational signage will help.

## ELEVATIONS / WETLANDS

During the fall and winter of 2014, the US Army Corps of Engineers deposited dredged material from the channel in Little Narragansett Bay on the island to increase the height.

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## MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

### Stewardship policies

Avalonia Land Conservancy Fee Land Stewardship Principles were approved on December 16, 2009 and the document is available at the Conservancy’s office on Hatch Street in Mystic, CT. This document sets forth the general principles governing stewardship of all Avalonia properties. The document or any approved successor is hereby incorporated as part of this management plan.

### Protection

#### Condition of Boundaries:

Boundary signs posted

USFWS has posted informational kiosks. Regulation signs have been posted and seasonal restriction signs are installed by USFWS along with rope boundaries depending upon where the birds nest. Signs on signposts typically get destroyed or covered up during winter storms.

The management objective for this property is to preserve its natural state as protected open space. USFWS is in the process of developing a management plan that may include future restoration of sand/dune areas after storms or for deposition of future dredging materials to support the island’s continual sand loss and new ideas to manage the nesting areas to ensure

better success for threatened birds.

An annual walk/kayak around the boundaries of the properties is required. The USFWS will GPS the estimated high tide line each year. Surveillance should be conducted at least annually, but in reality is far more frequent during summer months of greater activity and human and wildlife usage. All motorized vehicles are prohibited on the properties except for maintenance.

#### Maintaining property's appearance

Litter control. Campfires and overnight camping have been an issue in the past. Humans bringing dogs to the island is a significant issue, as they are perceived as a threat by birds, even when on leash.

#### Public use

The preserve is open to the public for passive recreational via a permit system. At present (2015) the Stonington COMO issues usage passes but this may fall to USFWS in the near future. Motor vehicles, bicycle riding, and horseback riding are not permitted. Hunting and the use of firearms on the property including bow hunting and target practice are not permitted. There is no visitation after dark, no overnight camping allowed. Larger groups are allowed for educational usage with prior permission from Avalonia. Dogs are not permitted on the island. Visitors are not allowed to pick vegetation or disturb wildlife excessively. Property taxes are paid to the Town of Westerly. These may be discontinued under USFWS management.

#### Enhancing wildlife habitat(s)

Work with USFWS to increase success rate of nesting birds. Summer monitoring of roping and signage and education of the public will go a long way to enhance breeding success.

#### Controlling invasive species

Removal of invasive species by manual means will be accomplished as resources permit.

#### Erosion control and flooding

The property will flood with sea level rise. Occasional replenishment of the sand via depositing of clean dredge material should be encouraged. If deemed appropriate, re-establishing native grasses may help with erosion control.

### Productive uses

The island provides nesting area for endangered shore birds and for Horseshoe Crabs. It acts as a protective buffer to the Little Narragansett bay north of the island, providing more sheltered spawning areas for fish and other marine life.

### Scientific and educational activities

Various groups use the island for educational activities. (Pine Point School, New England Science and Sailing, etc.)

Project Limulus conducts Horseshoe Crab tagging programs and DEEP monitors numbers.

Entomologists from Yale-Peabody Museum and Roger Williams Zoo are studying native beetle species dependent on Horseshoe crab nesting sites.

CUSH and Save the Bay conduct water-monitoring studies.

### Response to large natural disasters

Removal of any hazards will be undertaken as necessary.

### Special management considerations

As agreed to with USFWS. Management plan specifics are in process. Final plan will be attached. Avalonia and USFWS partners will work as team for management and future planning.

## IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

### Recurring and occasional requirements

Stonington Town Committee members visit the site often. Maintain communication with USFWS to ensure all goals for management, for wildlife and for Avalonia donors' intentions, are being met. Recording and reporting violations to USFWS at the Wildlife Refuge Complex in Charlestown, RI, (401-364-9124) to National Wildlife Refuge Staff present on the island, or if an emergency to local police.

### Annual obligations

A boundary walk/kayak survey around the outside perimeter the property is required. Meet with USFWS to discuss implementation of the lease, permitting, and other issues related to management of the island.

### Short-term plan (1 – 5 years)

Annual boundary survey. Regulation signs, kiosks, and other facilities will be maintained by the USFWS. Support USFWS efforts for good PR and public education. Continued monitoring of Gull predation and report to USFWS. Work with local groups to assist with beach and litter clean up.

### Long term plan (5+ years)

Monitor site. Control invasive plants. Public education

### Schedule for revising this plan

This plan shall be reviewed at least every five years and updated as necessary.

## APPENDICES

I. Zoning map for property and surrounding area is available at the Stonington Town Hall or online at <http://gis.stonington-ct.gov> and the Westerly GIS website: <http://host.cdmsmithgis.com/westerlyri/>

Stonington deeds are available in Avalonia files, Stonington Town Hall and online at <https://connecticut-townclerks-records.com/User/Login.aspx?ReturnUrl=%2fIndex.aspx>

II. USFWS Sandy Point Island Management Plan (in prep). Rhode Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex, 50 Bend Road, Charlestown, RI 02813. (401-364-9124)