



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 2015



The "Avalonia Quicksteps" entertained us. Photo by Bruce Fellman.

Return of the Avalonia Winter Potluck Dinner

by Anne Nalwalk

In response to a number of requests, Avalonia re-instituted its Potluck Dinner event, complete with door prizes, basket raffle, and illustrated program, on a rainy Saturday night, March 14, 2015, at St. James Episcopal Church in Preston.

The event began with a social hour at 5:30pm, and lively music supplied by the "Avalonia Quicksteps," a string group from western Connecticut and eastern Rhode Island. This diverse group not only provided the entertainment for the evening, but also generously donated their talents as a surprise live auction item, to play at the bidders' choice of venue at a later date. The winning bid was \$150- a great gift! Highlights among the door prizes were a gardening package, and a copy of Dr. Robert Askins's book, 'Saving the World's Deciduous Forests.' Raffle items included another gardening package and cedar bird houses made by Mac Turner. A handsome wall

hanging quilt donated by member Carol Hessler was displayed and will be raffled off at the Annual Meeting in May (details on page 3.)

During the social hour, Avalonia publications and posters illustrating our preserves and activities were available. A new booklet, "Avalonia Preserves," an illustrated listing of Avalonia holdings, was made available for the first time. Copies will be distributed as membership and donation incentives, and will be available for purchase.

The delicious, generous and varied dinner selections provided by Avalonia members were ably presented by a team of capable volunteers, served hot and promptly from the church's excellent kitchen.

Bruce Fellman, naturalist, educator and writer, presented an enlightening illustrated program, "Through the Seasons on Babcock Ridge and Beyond", showing some of the many things one can see on a single contiguous preserve throughout the seasons: salamander larvae with feathery gills swimming under the spring ice, a big black snake sunning high in a tree, song birds, nests, and the last dragonfly of the year.

A fine night was had by all. Donations and the raffle supported the event, and it may be repeated at a larger venue next year. Thanks to all for making our revived Avalonia Potluck Dinner a great success.



The potluck buffet. Photo by Bruce Fellman.

Communications

by Janice Parker

"Avalonia Trails" has been a key component of communication within Avalonia for many years, with only minor changes in format. We hope you still find it informative.

The new Communications Committee, which (as described in Dick Conant's article on page 3) was formerly called Public Relations and was part of the Development Standing Committee, is working to develop and integrate additional newer elements into our communications program. These include:

- Our Blog, "Avalonia eTrails" at <http://avaloniaetrails.blogspot.com>
- Our Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Avalonia-Land-Conservancy-Inc>

(continued on page 5)

Annual Appeal

by Heather Milardo

Our 2014 Annual Appeal has raised over \$17,000 to date. Our members and donors have responded to Avalonia's efforts with enthusiasm and generosity, and we are so grateful! If you have given we thank you warmly, if you have not yet donated, please do; our funding needs continue year-round.

In years past, all Annual Appeal donors were acknowledged in the spring newsletter. As donors are now listed in the Annual Report, we will not include them here in the newsletter as well. The Annual Report also includes additional financial information about our operating budget. It will be available for viewing or downloading at our website at www.avalonialandconservancy.org. If you have any questions or would like to discuss this change, please feel free to contact the office at 860-884-3500.

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS
2014-2015**

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Preston.....Margaret Gibson
Stonington.....Beth Sullivan
North Stonington.....Pat Turner

A Note from the Editor

by Janice Parker

Thank you to everyone who contributed the articles and photographs that comprise this issue of "Avalonia Trails," as well as those of you who planned and executed the events, programs and initiatives that are reported here. The deadline for our next issue is **August 23, 2015**, but feel free to submit material at any time.

We also offer our newsletter in digital form; if you would prefer to receive your copy by email, please let us know. Avalonia's contact information is on page 6.

Please be sure to read about the other publications we offer in the article starting on page 1.

Thanks again!

President's Message

Greetings everyone! It's finally spring! Despite the feet of snow, it was a busy winter for Avalonia. The Board of Directors has continued our governance activity, some of which you will read about elsewhere in this newsletter. In addition to our monthly board meetings, we held a retreat in February to continue our strategic planning process. We have committed to the path of Land Trust Alliance (LTA) accreditation. Our goal is to be accredited by the time we celebrate our 50th anniversary in 2018. The accreditation process will help us to become a more efficient organization as well as confirming our standing amongst our peers.

As part of the "Connecticut Land Trust Advancement Initiative" sponsored by the Connecticut Land Conservation Coalition (CLCC) we have chosen to work with the group conducting a feasibility study on shared services. We will join with five other land trusts and a consultant to explore the continuum of collaborative arrangements from shared services to mergers. The shared services arrangements to be contemplated include grant writing, communications, financial services, record keeping, and whatever other areas the organizations involved are interested in exploring. The grant runs for 18 months, so it will be a while before we have results to share.

Many of you joined us at the revival of the winter pot luck, which added a nice break in the winter doldrums. The event itself was a run-away success! I want to thank everyone who helped to make it possible. It was a great team effort and I look forward to continuing the tradition in the future. We are continuing to plan events to give members and their friends a chance to get together with Avalonia as a backdrop. Please join us at as many as you can!

We are happy to report that we are in the process of entering into a contract with US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for them to steward Sandy Point Nature Preserve. See the article on page 5 for more details.

Our partnership with the Connecticut College Goodwin-Niering Center for the Environment is paying off with unexpected dividends. In addition to five projects the students are doing as part of their program, we have two students working with us this semester as part of the college-sponsored work-study program. We'll report on their results at the annual meeting and in the next newsletter.

There are many exciting things happening for Avalonia – please check out the rest of the newsletter!

Executive Director's Letter

It's finally starting to look like spring out there and volunteers throughout Avalonia are thrilled by the prospect of finally being able to get out onto the Preserves. For the past few months, plans have been developing and anticipation has been building for some of the exciting projects that are in the works. One of the very large undertakings that you will be hearing about is the Dodge Paddock/Beal Preserve endeavor. I hope you take a moment to read more about it in the Stonington town committee report on page 5, as it is a great collaborative effort and a much-needed project for both Avalonia and the Borough of Stonington. We have also begun work with some Goodwin-Niering Environmental Studies students. We are proud of their efforts and inspired by the commitment of this new generation of conservationists.

We hope you continue to be inspired by the legacy that you are creating, in partnership with Avalonia, to preserve a love of the land and ensure the continuation of its diverse beauty and bounty.

P.S.: We have made an electronic version of 2013-2014 Annual Report available to view on the website. When you have a moment, please take a look at this redesigned report. Special thanks to Jonna Chokas for all her hard work in putting this together.

Annual Meeting

Friday May, 29th at 6:30pm.

North Stonington Seniors Center,

Holly Green Plaza, 391 Norwich-Westerly Road (Route 2)

We are excited to welcome two of the leaders of Connecticut College's Goodwin-Niering Environmental Science (GNES) Program as our guest speakers for the evening. Jennifer Pagach and Doug Thompson will be discussing their use of Avalonia in developing the curriculum and the ongoing collaboration between Avalonia and the GNES students.

The meeting will highlight this past year's accomplishments and will include the election of the 2015-2016 Board of Directors. We hope you are able to join us!

Nominating Committee Update

by Dick Conant

The Nominating Committee is charged with the responsibility of identifying qualified candidates for our Board of Directors (BOD) and to fill vacancies in our Standing Committees.

This year's Nominating Committee consisted of Heather Milardo, Katherine White, Russ Burgess, Michele Fitzpatrick, Beth Moore, Binti Ackley, and Dick Conant. And just like the Federal government, the Nominating Committee is here to help! Our dedicated group has been meeting monthly since January to put together a recommended slate for next year's BOD and all the Standing Committees. Current BOD members were polled as to their intentions to continue on the BOD and two of the Directors-at-Large position were deemed to require new members. This level of turn-over is in keeping with the Nominating Committee's core principle of gradual, orderly transition and succession planning, which will bring new members to the BOD and allow them to grow and advance with guidance from the more experienced BOD members. The Nominating Committee hopes to have two recommended Director-at-Large nominees in place by the end of April, ready for the election in May at our Annual Meeting (details in the article above).

As for the Standing Committees, the Nominating Committee is concentrating on getting all the committees fully staffed (at least 5 volunteers per committee as specified by the Avalonia by-laws) as we start into our upcoming fiscal year on June 1, 2015. To that end, we have combined Education and Outreach duties under the Communications Committee. (formerly called Public Relations, and combined with Development as a single Standing Committee.) With just a few more tweaks and gentle arm twisting we should have the proposed Standing Committee rosters ready for prime time. If you would be interested in serving on one of these committees, or would just like more information, please do not hesitate to contact any one of us, or send an email to avalonialc@yahoo.com.

The BOD will continue to actively support and encourage all the Standing Committees in the coming year, since each one will play a critical role in our organization as we move towards Land Trust Alliance accreditation.

See, I told you that the Nominating Committee was here to help...And you didn't believe me!

Quilt Raffle

Avalonia is fortunate in the talents of its volunteers. This spring we are excited to highlight a 42 inch square quilt that was made by Carol Hessler of Groton. Carol has generously donated this quilt to Avalonia to be raffled off. The raffle tickets are available now and can be purchased for \$10 per ticket at the office (call for hours) or by mail. You may purchase as many tickets / chances as you like. The drawing will take place at our May 29th Annual Meeting, but you do not need to be present to win.



Membership Drive

by Heather Milardo

The Annual Membership Drive is under way! Please keep an eye on your mailboxes in the coming month as you will be receiving your renewal information. You can also renew online at our website. We hope you will continue to support Avalonia's programs by renewing, and perhaps by increasing your level of support.

For those who become Life Members or who renew at the Patron membership level (\$500), you will receive the recently completed, color booklet of all of Avalonia's current preserves as a token of our appreciation. We hope you enjoy browsing through and that the pictures and trail maps will inspire to you get out and enjoy the places that you have helped to preserve and continue to help us maintain.



Amazon Smile *by Heather Milardo*

Did you know that Amazon has another version of their shopping site that allows you to donate to charity? It's called AmazonSmile and gives 0.5% of the value of purchases made to the non-profit of your choice, and Avalonia is eligible to receive your designated donations. You can find AmazonSmile at <https://smile.amazon.com>.

The site looks the same, the shopping experience is the same, and almost all of the products sold by Amazon are available. If you currently shop online, especially if you use Amazon, we encourage you to check out their new site. Every little bit helps!

National And Connecticut Trails Day Saturday, June 6, 2015

Cross-Town Hike, Groton

by Joellen Anderson

Dust off your hiking boots and plan to join us on our ever popular Cross-Town Hike in Groton on National and Connecticut Trails Day. The length of the hike is approximately 6 miles. Please come prepared to hike the entire distance.

Meet at 9:30 a.m. at the Bluff Point State Park Parking lot for registration. A bus will meet us at the hike's end at Beebe Pond for our return to Bluff Point at approximately 1-1:30 p.m.

We will hike from the Poquonnock River at Bluff Point to Beebe Cove on the Mystic River linking State Parks, Town of Groton Parks, and land owned by Groton Open Space Association (GOSA) and Avalonia Land Conservancy. This hike will be moderately paced and of medium difficulty. Participants are responsible for their own beverage and snacks (no water available along the way). There are toilet facilities only at Bluff Point and Haley Farm. Minimum road travel. Heavy rain cancels, there is no scheduled rain date. No dogs, please.

Co-sponsored by Avalonia, GOSA (gosaonline.org), and the Town of Groton Parks & Recreation Department.

Registration requested: contact Sidney Van Zandt at 860-572-5715 or email: svanzandt3@aol.com

Tefftweald Nature Hike, North Stonington

by Bruce Fellman

Early June is a great time for all sorts of wildlife, and this 77-acre preserve packs a lot of habitat diversity into a small and easily walkable space. We'll be hiking slowly through woods, fields, and along the edge of Wyassup Brook, and we'll spend time searching and listening for songbirds, as well as looking for amphibians and dragonflies. There's an intriguing old graveyard that history buffs will enjoy and a flat ledge called the Poet's Bench, a perfect place for contemplation, drawing, putting an entry into your journal, or using as a photo op. Hike leader Bruce Fellman, a veteran naturalist and photojournalist, will highlight the Preserve's abundant plants and animals and help with photography. Bring binoculars, cameras, magnifying glasses, and field guides. There's even a very nice pavilion for a picnic lunch.

Meet at parking area just off 282 Grindstone Hill Road at 10 am.

Registration recommended: contact Bruce Fellman at 860-599-4867. or email: fellnature@sbcglobal.net.

In Memoriam

We report with sadness the death of member Charles Ridall who died February 24, 2015, at the age of 90. We thank Charlie's wife Jean and his family for naming Avalonia as the recipient of donations in his memory

Ducks Today and Ducks Tomorrow

by David Lersch

A joint effort between Avalonia and the Connecticut Chapter of Delta Waterfowl Foundation will ensure Wood Ducks and other avian species will find much more accessible and safer nesting opportunities in Avalonia wetlands. Whereas much of the effort to sustain populations of waterfowl migrations focus attention in northern plain states and in Canada, Connecticut has its place in producing waterfowl that will breed, raise their young, migrate, and return to their origin to begin the cycle again.

Avalonia properties are some of the most potentially productive habitat for duck production in the area. If we can help to increase their nesting success, we can dramatically increase populations of wood ducks and other birds that migrate along the Atlantic Flyway. Delta Waterfowl Research in North Dakota and Canada has shown that installing nesting structures reduces predation and can increase nesting success by threefold.



John Farnell installs duck nesting box at Deer Run, North Stonington.

Photo provided by David Lersch.

The photo above shows Chapter Co-Chair John (JP) Farnell putting the finishing touches on a Wood Duck nest box in Avalonia's Deer Run on Prentice Brook in North Stonington. Within one hour after erecting the box, he observed a mating pair of Wood Ducks swimming under the nest. Additional wood duck nest boxes are being erected on other Avalonia properties.

Approximately 11 species of birds, including Kestrels and Screech Owls, may also use these nests. The exact location of each nest box will be documented with the DEEP and checked and cleaned each year in the Fall/Winter months. The DEEP keeps records of bird types using the nests and the size of the clutch, among other data.

Additional information about Delta Waterfowl Foundation may be found on its web site at www.deltawaterfowl.org.

David Lersch is Chairman of the Delta Waterfowl Foundation, New London Chapter.

Griswold Bicentennial

by Joellen Anderson

Stay connected and plan to attend Griswold's ongoing bicentennial events throughout this summer and fall.

Visit their town bicentennial event calendar for specific events of interest and dates.

Stay tuned on Avalonia's website for a fall Walktober event on Avalonia's Walton Meadow Preserve.

Report From the Stonington Town Committee

by Beth Sullivan

This winter season was truly challenging, trying to get anything accomplished out on the preserves. From that first snow, the conditions were never acceptable for boundary walks or postings. Other than a few snow shoe trips out and about where it was feasible, very little stewardship took place, however, we remained busy with planning and projects.

The Dodge Paddock Restoration Project planning is full speed ahead. Under the leadership of MaryEllen Mateleska from the Aquarium, which is administering the grant, we have developed planting ideas, tools and materials lists, scheduled work parties (two of which were already cancelled due to snow) and lined up volunteers. On March 15 our team, including our consultant and landscape designer, gave a presentation at the LaGrua Center to invited guests, Borough residents, neighbors and others from organizations who may have an interest in the project. Our presentation touched on history, present day challenges, and future plans. The neighbors are very happy with the effort and attention, and successful drainage so far. We are grateful to some terrific partners, especially CT DEEP, as we move forward to restore the property. The project was high-lighted in the Spring edition of "Connecticut Wildlife" magazine.

The Audubon CT Forest Bird Habitat Assessment made suggestions for management to diversify habitat and restore forest health on our Hoffman Evergreen Preserve. We have submitted an application for Environmental Quality Incentive program (EQIP) funding for a Forestry Plan that will precede any decisions to move forward with action

We are also moving forward with funding requests to help us install four beautiful signs created by our Trinity College team studying habitat management and invasive control on Knox Preserve. They will provide a real educational boost for that popular preserve and explain our work to create quality habitat. We are also moving into the next stage of restoration of native plants/grasses there, in areas where the invasive plants have been intensively addressed over the last 3 years.

The Peck/Callahan New England Cottontail project is essentially completed in terms of active effort. We had hoped to get out with CT DEEP to do stem density counts and look for pellets, but again the snow was too deep. However, our reports of this project: the efforts it took to accomplish it and the great collaboration of various agencies that helped us, have made headlines and gotten some national recognition as presented by the chief of the USDA! We will look forward to getting out this spring and summer to assess new growth and wildlife usage.

Our wonderful collaboration with Connecticut College's Goodwin-Niering Center for the Environment continues this year. Ten students have chosen to focus their efforts on outreach, communication, helping with efforts to document our history, both with important individuals, and also by researching land records of certain properties. In past years the efforts have been directed to stewardship projects. This year is different, but it's a good thing, since this year they couldn't see the ground!!

Beth Sullivan is Chair of the Stonington Town Committee. This is the first of a series of articles featuring each of our member towns.

Sandy Point Update

by Beth Sullivan

Great News! As you read this, we will be approaching the start of a new era of preservation on Sandy Point. We are now in the final stages of negotiating a ten year lease with the US Fish and Wildlife Service for oversight and management of this special preserve. The Gildersleeve family gave us the island in 1982 to be used "as a nature preserve, however, the grantee in its sole discretion may lease the premises for purposes of recreation as long as said use does not substantially adversely affect the condition of the premises as a nature preserve."

The island is an important habitat for several threatened species of birds for nesting, as well as for migratory stop overs, and is a significant breeding area for horseshoe crabs. Finding a balance between human and wildlife usage has always been difficult, because activities such as camping, fireworks, kite flying and dogs are detrimental to the wildlife. Under the terms of the new lease, the USFWS team of stewards will provide a presence that will not only protect the habitat and creatures by enforcing the rules, but will also educate the public about the necessity of such rules and engage their cooperation. There will be new signs, and rules and regulations will be posted.

Spring is here and the birds and volunteers are returning! Join us!



Aerial view of Dodge Paddock showing where Phragmites have been removed and drainage is controlled. Photo by Roger Wolfe.

Communications

(continued from page 1)

- Our website: <http://www.avalonialandconservancy.org>, which includes links to the blog and to Facebook, and which, when its upgrade is completed, will also feature a newsletter archive
- A new e-newsletter, which will include new content not covered in the newsletter and will help to keep you informed between issues.

All members currently receive "Avalonia Trails" either in the mail, or by email as a full-color pdf, according to their preference. Subscribing to Facebook and the blog is optional and is not limited to Avalonia members. The new e-newsletter will initially go to all members for whom we have an email address, but you can unsubscribe at any time. If you would like to receive the e-newsletter and are not currently, please contact us at avalonialc@yahoo.com. Rest assured that we *never* share your information.

Other publications that the Communications Committee make available are: a property list of all Avalonia holdings (developed and maintained by the Stewardship Committee), "Avalonia Preserves," an illustrated preserve list with trail maps, and our Annual Report. Please contact us if you would like a copy of any of these.



AVALONIA LAND CONSERVANCY. INC.

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

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Upcoming Events

Wednesday, April 29th, from 4:00pm to close. Margaritas, 12 Water Street, Mystic, CT will host a Noche Mexicana Fundraiser and donate 15% of pre-taxed food and beverage sales, if you let the host or server know you are there for Avalonia.

Friday May 29, 6:30 pm. Annual General Meeting of the membership. Details on page 3.

Saturday June 6. National Trails Day.

Cross-town Hike, Groton, 9:30am. About 6 miles, ~3.5-4 hours. Meet at Bluff Point State Park parking lot.

Tefftweald Nature Hike, 10 am. About 1.5 miles, 2-2.5 hours. Meet at parking area just off 282 Grindstone Hill Road, North Stonington. Details of Trails Day hikes can be found on page 4.

Saturday June 13, 10 am. We will meet interested folks at Dodge Paddock/Beal Preserve in Stonington to walk and talk about the restoration project and take questions. This will be the first in a series of such walks over the life of the project to watch the progress. Led by Beth Sullivan and MaryEllen Mateleska. Limited parking at end of Wall Street. Heavy rain cancels.

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www.avalonialandconservancy.org