



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 2015-2016

Avalonia to Seek Land Trust Accreditation

by Janice Parker

We are very happy to announce that Avalonia Land Conservancy, Inc. is applying for accreditation from the Land Trust Accreditation Commission.

Accreditation is awarded only to those land trusts that meet the highest standards of stewardship, governance and responsibility. Avalonia adopted Land Trust Standards and Practices several years ago and has been working conscientiously to bring our organization into full compliance with these criteria. We submitted our pre-application January 21, 2016, with the goal of achieving accreditation by our 50th anniversary in 2018.

We are investing this considerable effort because we believe that accreditation is the “gold standard” of land trust performance and that our members, supporters and donors are entitled to the assurance that it offers that Avalonia maintains the highest possible standards, and is fully equipped to protect its conservation holdings in perpetuity.

The Land Trust Accreditation Commission, which is an independent program of the Land Trust Alliance, conducts an extensive review of each applicant’s policies and programs. Avalonia will be subject to such a review.

You may have seen notices in the ‘Public Notices’ section of your newspaper announcing that a public comment period is now open. The Commission invites public input and accepts signed, written comments on pending applications. Comments must relate to how Avalonia complies with national quality standards. These standards address the ethical and technical operation of a land trust. For the full list of standards, see <http://www.landtrustaccreditation.org/help-and-resources/indicator-practices>.

To learn more about the accreditation program and to submit a comment, visit www.landtrustaccreditation.org, or email your comment to info@landtrustaccreditation.org. Comments may also be faxed or mailed to the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, Attn: Public Comments: (fax) 518-587-3183; (mail) Land Trust Accreditation Commission, 36 Phila Street, Suite 2, Saratoga Springs, NY 12866. Public comments on Avalonia’s application will be accepted until May 20, 2016.

Challenge Grant Update *by Heather Milardo*

You did it!!! Thanks to your generous support, we not only met the Challenge, but exceeded it.

As you know, the original goal was \$10,000, since a generous donor had pledged this amount to our Bedrock Fund for land acquisition provided we could match it.

You rose to the challenge and not only met the goal, you exceeded it! The final tally of all Challenge Grant donations was \$11,295. These will be used as the individual donors directed.

It has been so inspiring to see so many people come together to make this happen.

Thank you so much!



Nominations Are Open!

Hard though it is to believe, we are two-thirds of the way through Avalonia’s fiscal year, which means it is time we start planning our next election. (Not *that* one; we are talking about the election of Avalonia’s Board of Directors in May 2016!)

We have vacancies and we are looking for a few good men and women to fill them. Terms are for one year. There are no formal qualifications beyond Avalonia membership, and a sincere love of conservation. If you have prior experience on a Board, or in a non-profit organization, that’s wonderful. If not, we are happy to provide on-the-job training.

If you are interested, or if you would just like to know more, please contact us: 860-884-3500 or avaloniac@yahoo.com. We would love to hear from you.

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS
2014-2015**

OFFICERS

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

DIRECTORS-AT-LARGE

Karen Askins
Richard Conant
Scott Dawley
Mike Pernal

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
Stewardship..... Karen Askins

TOWN COMMITTEE CHAIRS

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



Volunteer(s) needed!

Avalonia is currently looking for a volunteer with graphic design experience. We have been enhancing our outreach efforts through a more active Communications Committee and have identified a strong need for a volunteer to help with brochures, rack cards, annual reports and more. If you are interested, or if you know of anyone who has the needed skills and would be willing to help us out a few hours per month, please call 860-884-3500 or email h.milardo@avalonialc.org.

President's Message

Greetings everyone,

Many people use the year end/new year as a time to reflect on their past accomplishments and as a chance to look at where they're going. I'd like to use the new year as an opportunity for reflection on Avalonia as an organization as well as looking forward.

I would like to reflect on what we do and why we do it. Our mission statement gives a brief summary of WHAT we do:

Avalonia Land Conservancy, Inc. preserves natural habitats in southeastern Connecticut by acquiring and protecting lands and by communicating the value of these irreplaceable resources.

But WHY do we do it? There are many reasons, which will vary for different people. Some reasons include preserving as many different habitats as possible, to assist with maintaining biodiversity, which is important to the health of the planet. A healthy planet contributes to healthy people. A recent article in the New London *Day* noted that the international climate agreement reached in Paris in December recognized that keeping and increasing forestland worldwide will be an important part of the solution to slowing climate change. While not all of the open space we preserve is forested, much of it is.

The Avalonia Board of Directors has made a commitment to being more proactive in the acquisition of new preserves as a way to expand on our mission and the awesome work that has been accomplished by members, donors, and other supporters in the past. I want to thank all of you for the part that you play in accomplishing this mission.

Finally, the LTA accreditation process is giving us the opportunity to take a close look at the way we do things as an organization, which we refer to as our governance process. We are also using this as an opportunity for process improvement, which will continue long after the application has been submitted.

I hope everyone is having a safe and happy winter!

Executive Director's Note

Happy New Year! As we prepare for accreditation, and with our 50th anniversary on the horizon, Avalonia has spent a lot of time during the past year reviewing what we are doing, how we can improve, and what our focus is.

In the world of environmental organizations, there are several key roles that all fit together to make up the complete land conservation picture. There are land trusts, educators, advocates, researchers, monitors, and more. As a land trust, our role is essential. We are responsible for the acquisition and preservation of open space and, in order to have the greatest impact, we must focus our energy and remain diligent in filling that role. So in the coming year we look to our mission: to the acquisition, stewardship, and communication efforts that encompass our piece of the conservation puzzle.

Avalonia will continue to work closely with our conservation partners and neighbors and to use our expertise in the field of strategic acquisition to ensure that the land of eastern Connecticut is protected now and forever. Thank you for being a part of this and for your dedication to conservation.

Membership Drive

by Janice Parker

As a reader of this newsletter, you are probably aware that Avalonia is a membership-supported organization; we are dependent upon membership dues and our Annual Appeal for the funds that support our operations. While we are aggressive in seeking grants for capital expenses and land acquisition, typically grant funding is not available for routine operating expenses. It's the financial support of our members that puts fuel in our chainsaws, mowers and trimmers and provides the lumber and nails to maintain our bridges, boardwalks, and hiking trails. Also, while we are heavily dependent upon, and deeply grateful for, the efforts of our volunteers, there are jobs which, because of the expertise involved and/or the sheer volume of labor required, must be done by paid professionals.

Over recent years, our conservation holdings have increased substantially, and now comprise more than 3500 acres. This increases our stewardship workload and expenses. We have also embarked upon a number of new initiatives (e.g. ambitious habitat restoration and forestry management programs, expansion of our educational and community outreach offerings, development and implementation of plans of strategic land acquisition and improved land management) that further increase our operating expenses. Our membership, upon which we depend for dues revenue and volunteer support, has not kept pace.

In 2016 we plan to implement a membership drive, with the goal of both improving our membership engagement, and increasing our membership revenues. We plan to offer more outreach activities to our members (events, and gatherings, informational and educational programs, hikes and excursions) and encourage participation by the general public.

Please plan to attend some of these, and bring your family and friends. Some events (especially those that are weather-dependent, such as snow-shoe outings) will be organized on an impromptu, sometimes last-minute basis (see page 5 for more details); if you would like to be notified of these when they happen, please **send us your email address to newsletter@avalonialc.org**. We will add your name to an outing distribution list, and invite you when an event is planned. (Messages to our office address avalonialc@yahoo.com will work too, if you put 'Impromptu outings' in the subject line.) Rest assured that Avalonia *never* shares your email, or any other contact or personal information.

When we send out our membership renewal materials in May, we will also be sending out a survey for your feedback. We hope that you will take this opportunity to let us know what you would like from Avalonia, and how you would like to see your land trust operate and develop in the future. If you choose to renew now, either using the form on this page, or online at avalonialandconservancy.org/membership/ you will save us the cost of mailing you a reminder in May, and your membership will be extended through to the end of May 2017. You will still receive a survey, if you wish.

We hope you will share Avalonia newsletters and other communications with your friends, encourage them to join, and perhaps give gift memberships. If your finances permit, please also consider increasing your level of support to the next level when you renew in May, or adding a donation to your regular dues. Thank you!

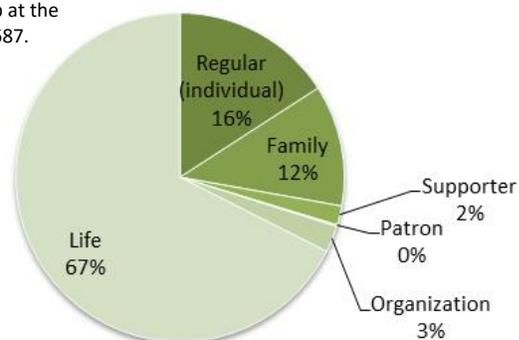


Antique mill gears at Yannatos Preserve.

Photo by Janice Parker.

2015 membership

Total membership at the end of 2015 was 687.



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

Annual Appeal Update *by Heather Milardo*

We are now more than two months into our Annual Appeal and we are so happy to see the generosity of so many of our members and friends. The goal for this year's appeal is \$20,000. As of February 5, we had raised \$8,770.00 so we are still at only 44% of our goal. We need your help to make it happen!

The Annual Appeal is Avalonia's fundamental fundraising tool and accounts for the largest component of our general income. Land stewardship expenses, public education, seminars and training, outreach, volunteer insurance... all of these are supported through the Annual Appeal. We ask you to please help us reach our goal this year.

The 2015 calendar year is over, but Avalonia's fiscal year runs through the end of May 2016, and our needs are year-long. We know that many of you prefer to give at the time you do your tax-preparation, and we hope that you will think of us when doing your tax-planning for 2016. Your donation to Avalonia is tax-deductible to the full extent permissible by law.

For those who have already made a donation, we sincerely thank you!

Walktober at Walton Meadow



Visitors explored Avalonia's Mary & John Walton Meadow Preserve in Griswold, which was featured in Griswold's Bicentennial celebrations and as part of The Last Green Valley (TLGV) 'Walktober' program. The October 4, 2015 event, which also allowed visitors to view the 18th century Timothy Lester Homestead, attracted more than 40 participants, according to organizer Jellen Anderson. The Walton Meadow Preserve was a meeting and training ground for Revolutionary War militias. Donated to Avalonia by member Mary Walton in 1996 it is now preserved as an open grassland and wildflower habitat, bordered by wooded wetlands. Visit it any day between dawn and dusk; it is located at 285 Browning Road in Griswold.

Barn Island Nature Hike



Glossy ibis photographed at Barn Island by Rick Newton.

Learn about the ecology of the salt marshes that have been important throughout local history and which are already experiencing significant alterations due to changing climate and rising sea levels.

Avalonia protects significant salt marsh acreage, in both Stonington and Groton, (Cottrell and Continental Marshes, for example) all of which are experiencing similar changes. Barn Island is more easily accessed and the most frequently monitored. Bring binoculars for birding, and your camera if you are a photographer; this is excellent habitat for waterfowl.

This outing is organized by the Ledyard Public Library and will be led by Avalonia's Beth Sullivan. Meet at the boat ramp parking lot at the end of Palmer Neck Road in Stonington on Sunday March 20 at 1pm.

Tailgate refreshments will be offered after the hike, courtesy of the Friends of Ledyard Libraries. Register online: www.eventkeeper.com/code/events.cfm?curOrg=LEDYARD. Bad weather cancels.



Osprey (L) and Blue Heron (R) both photographed at Cottrell Marsh. by Rick Newton

Dodge Paddock/Beal Preserve Restoration Update

by Beth Sullivan

As most of you know, Dodge Paddock/Beal Preserve is a small property (< 4 acres) that has experienced more than its share of problems in recent years. Always plagued by drainage issues and the encroachment of invasive plants, it was devastated by Superstorm Sandy in 2012. Since then, it has been the recipient of much volunteer attention and labor,



After the Storm.

Photo by Beth Sullivan.

with outstanding results.

The gravel berm, created by Hurricane Sandy, will be planted with even more native shrubs and grasses to stabilize it. The rocks that are there now are a temporary solution, since even they cannot withstand the force of storm waves and high tides, but in time grasses and shrubs will send down their roots and create a mesh of support that will hold the rocks and the soil. The light colored erosion cloth that is still visible, will protect the area through this winter and we can plant seeds and grasses right into it.

The marsh grasses we planted in as an experiment this past spring were a huge success. They not only held on in the face of tides, but also persistent crows! They have even grown larger and flowered. We will put in a lot more of them in the whole wet basin area this spring.

We had a harder time with some of the experimental shrub plantings. I guess that is what experiments are for. We learned a lot. There are just some really difficult conditions for plants to have to deal with in those areas: soil chemistry is challenging, and variable salinities and water levels, all make it pretty difficult for many things to survive. We have a number of excellent people working on the challenge and we will hope that this spring and summer we will see even more green and less brown.

The tidal flushing is working beautifully. While you see more water flowing into the Paddock and up into Beal during the highest of tides, it flows back out quickly. There will be much less of a problem with standing water after heavy rains and therefore hopefully fewer flooded basements and far fewer mosquitoes. We realize the ditch will get clogged with eelgrass periodically and that may temporarily obstruct flow, but it will be a lot easier to clean out now.

Our fight with the invasives will be ongoing. They were treated in many areas and then mowed down. We will see what comes back in the spring. The areas along the north wall will remain a challenge, but treatment and mowing on a schedule will be key.

We have been very lucky that so many of the efforts directed to this special piece of land, have been funded by grants (thank you Long Island Sound Futures Fund and CT DEEP) and individual donors (thank you, you know who you are!). Not every project or team leader is so lucky. I am truly grateful.

Announcing: Impromptu Outings

by Janice Parker

Do you ever get up one fine morning eager for a walk and wishing you had some company, or a new destination to explore? Have you ever been looking forward to a hike, only to have it rained out? Are you frustrated that by the time Avalonia's "Upcoming Events" come up, you have recycled your newsletter?



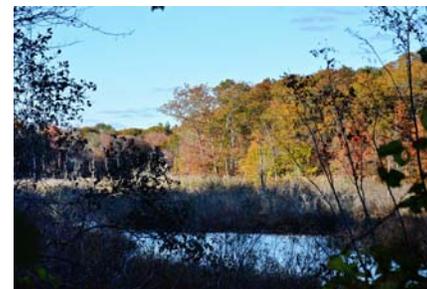
Whose tracks are these?

Photo courtesy USFWS.

We are working to address your needs. Now we have our email notification program organized, we are planning to offer a series of impromptu outings, designed to accommodate the vagaries of Mother Nature as well as the whims of our volunteers. We envisage a program of walks, nature-study outings, paddles and snowshoe hikes, that are based on what is blooming or breeding, migrating or mating, precipitating or proliferating, at any given time, rather than planned weeks or months in advance.

If you **send us your email address** (to me directly at newsletter@avalonialc.org or to our office at avalonialc@yahoo.com) with "Impromptu Outing" in the subject line, you will be notified when we have a program. We plan to offer you a variety of enjoyable, spontaneous walks and other events.

Send us your email address and let us to surprise you!



Where is this?

Photo by Bruce Fellman.

Answers: Muskrat, Wyassup Brook Preserve



AVALONIA LAND CONSERVANCY. INC.

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

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Non-Profit Organization

U.S. POSTAGE PAID

Mystic, CT

Permit No. 126

Avalonia has a Facebook page:



Read our weekly blog for updates between newsletter issues:
<http://avaloniaetrails.blogspot.com>



Upcoming Events

Impromptu outings. Join our email distribution list to be notified of outings and spontaneous gatherings between newsletter issues. See page 5 for details. Remember: we need your current email address to invite you.

Barn Island Nature Walk. Led by Beth Sullivan, Sunday, March 20, 1pm Details on page 5.

Full moon walks. Offered free by Conn College Arboretum. Explore the native plant collection and the Arboretum pond under the full moon, guided by Arboretum Assistant Director, Maggie Redfern. Bring a flashlight. Meet at the arboretum entrance on Williams Street, New London, Thursday, April 21, 8-9pm and Friday, May 20, 8-9pm. Call 860-439-5020 to register.

Avalonia phone: (860) 884-3500
Avalonia e-mail: avalonialc@yahoo.com
www.avalonialandconservancy.org