



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 2012-2013

Superstorm Sandy Impacts Avalonia Preserves in Stonington

by Beth Sullivan

Stonington took a double punch from Superstorm Sandy, high winds and storm surge. While we offer our heartfelt sympathies to those in New York and New Jersey who lost so much more, we were indeed rattled to our roots.

The coastal preserves were victims of the storm surge. We watched the water come up on the first high tide, up to the road at Knox Preserve. During the night time high tide, the water rose over the road, over the cemetery, into the fields and down toward the railroad tracks. Several large cedars in a clump were toppled off the banks onto the trail by the combined force of water and wind. The tide delivered rows of litter, seaweed and debris. For more than a week, ducks swam happily in places where corn grew a few years ago. Take some time to collect debris from such an area and you may never use Styrofoam again.

Most seriously hit was Dodge Paddock, which is surrounded by old sea-walls; the wave action and surge smashed through several areas, breaching walls, tossing boulders like small stones and logs like battering rams. The debris field is deep with rocks, seaweed, eelgrass and lumber from docks and sheds and fences, from who knows where, and extends up into Beal Preserve. The drainage pipe was fractured and then filled so the surge waters had no way out and the entire preserve remained flooded until we could get it opened, with blessings from DEEP representatives who came to survey the damage.

As an interesting comparison, Cottrell Marsh, a large expanse of natural, un-walled salt marsh, also took the surge, but as Mother Nature intended, the waters flowed up and over, were buffered by the wetlands then back out and today the marsh is almost as it was, with the exception of high wrack lines of seaweed and debris. Maybe there is a lesson here.

Sandy Point, possibly our most visited preserve, and one of the most vulnerable to the open ocean, was a major concern: What would we find at dawn on Tuesday? Good news: aerial photos show the island intact, not breached. It is broader and flatter, with definite loss of stabilizing vegetation.



*Trails submerged by storm surge at Knox Preserve.
Photo by Beth Sullivan*

Inside this issue

President's Corner	2
Superstorm Sandy (continued)	2
Superstorm Sandy: Additional Status Reports	3
In Memoriam: MP Morton	3
Project Wild and WET	3
Annual Appeal 2012	4
Poquetanuck Cove Action Plan Update	4
Book recommendation	5
New Years Resolutions?	5
Avalonia Dog Policy	5
Membership renewal	5
Upcoming events	6

Robe Conservation Restriction added to Avalonia Holdings *by Anne Nalwalk*

In August Avalonia accepted a Conservation Restriction (CR) from Quincy and Charlotte Robe of Malta, Ohio on approximately 40 acres of their 47-acre woodlot on Glasgo Road in Griswold, retaining 7 acres for a possible house lot and driveway. The property is primarily steep wooded slopes and wetlands draining north into Rixtown Brook (also known as Ashwillet Brook). The Robes have owned and managed the property as a hardwood lot for the 32 years they have owned it, so it is accessible by a system of woods roads. The Robes have also made a cash donation to



Anne Nalwalk, Quincy Robe and Anne Roberts-Pierson. Photo by Joellen Anderson

Avalonia toward subsequent stewardship of the property.

The Robe Conservation Restriction adds to Avalonia's holdings in Griswold, which include the recently acquired 20-acre Burluson Tract of the Billings Brook Preserve directly to the north and the 26-acre original Billings Brook Preserve to the west, creating a contiguous woodland block of nearly 86 acres. In addition, the Robe CR abuts a 180-acre tract of Pachaug State Forest for nearly 2000 feet to the south.

The Robes first considered their CR in 2009 when Quincy urged Avalonia to purchase the adjacent property from Katherine Burluson when it became available. Quincy has a long history with Avalonia, having served on the Board of Directors for 18 years between 1985 and 2004.

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Avalonia phone: (860) 884-3500

Avalonia e-mail: avalonialc@yahoo.com

www.avalonialandconservancy.org

President's Corner

I hope you and your family have recovered from any damage you may have sustained from Superstorm Sandy. Several of Avalonia's properties had some damage, detailed elsewhere in this newsletter, including storm surge damage and numerous fallen trees. As a matter of policy, where these pose a safety concern to hikers on our trails, the hazards are removed, but generally a fallen or broken tree in a forest is part of the natural succession process. Limbs and logs on the ground become habitat for salamanders and a multitude of other organisms. The cavities and snags of broken tree trunks become nesting sites and, in the case of one such tree on our lot, a way station for the nightly activity of a flying squirrel. To some the fallen timber in a forest looks untidy, to others it represents the complex pattern of an ecological system. (When bushwhacking off trail systems I often recall a description by James Fenimore Cooper of the odd loping gait of Natty Bumppo, attributed to all the years of stepping over the fallen trees of a natural forest.)

As Beth Sullivan comments in her article (on page 1 and continued below), the ways in which varied habitats recover after a natural assault may have much to teach us about our own stewardship practices.

This is the time of year when, in our Annual Appeal, we ask for financial support to continue our mission of preserving natural habitats. The manual labor involved is hard enough, but the legal complexity of this work seems to grow monthly and we all know that legal documentation means money. Along with the demands on us from outside requirements we have increased work simply because we have been successful in our mission. During our last fiscal year we added over a million dollars' worth of preserved land to our inventory. This success increases our stewardship requirements, our administrative requirements and our requirements for IRS reporting. Whenever we receive over \$500,000 in donated land we are required to have a full (and costly) audit of our finances. So help out if you can and enjoy the trees, standing and otherwise.

We thank you for your support. Avalonia is your land trust, and we couldn't do it without you.



Superstorm Sandy

Sandy Point will continue to be more vulnerable to high storm tides, but the habitat may have improved for small birds, terns and plovers, as well as for horseshoe crabs. Less vegetation will be less inviting for the destructive nesting gulls.



David Barbone and Kate Robinson with a giant uproot at Paffard Woods.
Photo By Beth Sullivan.

open as well. Knox Family Farm is the only Preserve still closed at time of writing, awaiting professional evaluation for a large tree, hanging, suspended by vines, across the path.

Thanks to many volunteers, most trails are opened and clear. We have new brush piles for wildlife and openings in the forest canopies. Some projects will take longer than others, some things will have changed forever. We have to think long and hard about how we repair or replace walls and drainage pipes. Water will continue to rise, storms will continue to batter and Mother Nature is bound to win.

(continued from page 1)

Many of our wooded properties are large enough for trails and public access, so the priority there was to assess the damage to those from a safety standpoint. How sad it was to get out on Tuesday after the storm and witness the devastation. The high winds had their biggest impact on pines, soft and full, and the red oaks that still carried a load of leaves. Paffard Woods, close to the coast, had the most damage from wind. Many big pines were twisted and broken. Two of the largest ones came down in the parking area and across the trail head. Several days of work parties, small and large, cleared the trails of large oaks and made big brush piles, hopefully appreciated by wintering birds and mammals, and by Saturday the trails, parking lot and trail head were all cleared and families were out walking and expressing gratitude. Other trails, Perkins, Deans Mill, White Cedar, Swamp, Hoffman and Perry had blow-down obstructions, large and small, but by week's end with lots of volunteer effort, they were cleared and

Superstorm Sandy: Additional Status Reports

Groton: (as reported by Dick Conant) With limited property exposure to immediate shorelines and tidal impacts, most of Groton's damage was limited to windfalls in the upland forests at Moore and Anderson Woodlands. A volunteer crew with chain-saw spent two hours on the Moore Woodlands removing a Norway spruce and assorted dead cedar trunks from the trails. One additional spruce was snapped off some 8 feet above ground level and hung up in the surrounding tree canopy. Due to the danger involved in this removal project, we are looking to contract a professional to come in and remove the hazard.

Anderson Woods suffered the brunt of the impacts from Sandy with over 15 large oaks and beeches toppled. The numerous tree windfalls were caused by a combination of eastern exposure to the winds and shallow root systems on the extensive stone ledge and wetlands that make up the property. Since no trees were downed on trails, we intend to let nature take its course. Eventually the decomposition of the downed trees should provide some wildlife habitat and benefits on the property.

Ledyard: (as reported by Mike Goodwin) About 24 trees down across trails, most of them in Pine Swamp Wildlife Corridor. Mike Goodwin and John Williams did most of the cleanup work with help from Dixie Goodwin. Damage wasn't as bad as after Tropical Storm Irene, but many large trees were uprooted on and off the trails. In Irene many of the trees snapped halfway up. We didn't see that type of damage this time. Volunteers spent 6 hours on the Avery Preserve, 4 hours on the Barrett Preserve and 19 hours on PSWC, which are the only trailed properties in Ledyard. Trails are open.

Griswold: (as reported by Duncan Schweitzer) Mac Turner, Pat Turner and Duncan Schweitzer spent a total of around 15 hours inspecting Griswold preserves and found no safety hazards in need of attention.

North Stonington: (as reported by Mac Turner) A few trees down on the Reed-Mitchell Preserve, but no trail obstructions.

Preston: (as reported by Margaret Gibson) Minimal damage. Trails open.



Left: Entrance to Knox Preserve
Photo by Beth Sullivan

Right: Aerial view of flooding at Dodge Paddock/Beal Preserve
Photo by Roger Wolfe

Below left: Seawall breach at Dodge Paddock
Photo by Beth Sullivan



Project Wild and WET

by Joellen Anderson

Would you like to have "a lot of laughs and the experience of teaching science through hands-on activities"? Read the article in the most recent newsletter of the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association (WPWA) titled 'Project Wild and WET Facilitators Workshops'. The newsletter is available online at www.wpwa.org/newsletters/Newsletter_Fall_2012.pdf

The object of these workshops, offered jointly by the RI Department of Environment Fish & Wildlife Aquatic Resource Education Program (RIDEM), Audubon Society of RI and WPWA, is to train facilitators who can then in turn train teachers and community members how to use these informative curricula, which are designed to educate about aquatic ecosystems.

If, after reading this article, you have an interest in using your teaching or other environmentally-oriented experience to become trained as a facilitator, please let us know. The training is free, but there is an expectation that participants will subsequently share their learning by offering similar workshops in the community. Avalonia would, of course, be happy to sponsor such events and provide whatever support would be necessary to the facilitator offering them.

If you would like to be a part of this worthwhile environmental education and community outreach initiative, please get in touch; call us at 860 884 3500 or send an email to avalonialc@yahoo.com.

In memoriam

We mourn the loss of

Mary Preston Morton

MP was a loyal supporter and dedicated volunteer, as well as a delightful person. She will be missed.

We appreciate the kindness of her husband RB Jones and her family who designated Avalonia as the recipient of *in memoriam* donations, and the generosity of all her friends who made such donations.

Annual Appeal 2012

by Duncan Schweitzer

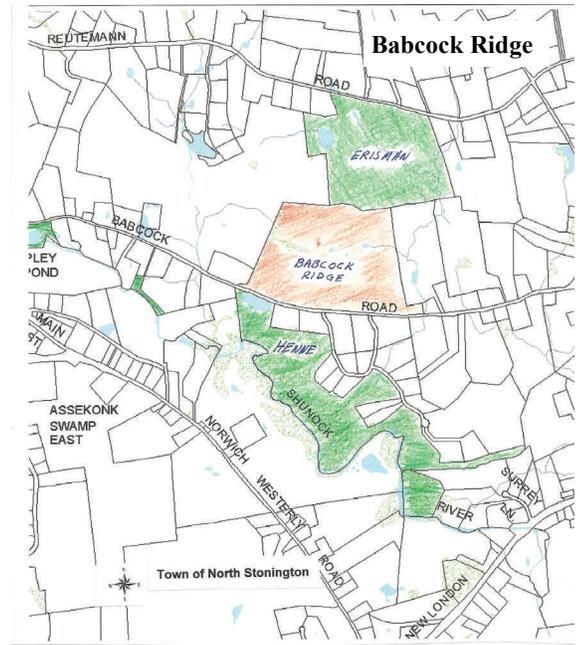
Our 2012 Annual Appeal is underway. We ask our members and friends for donations only once each year and trust them to give to the limits of their ability. The proceeds from our Appeal are our largest single source of income and we are heavily dependent upon that revenue to accomplish our mission of conservation and stewardship.

In recent years we have added substantially to our holdings, which now comprise more than 3000 acres. Increasingly these acquisitions are strategically planned, that is, they are chosen for their ecological and conservation value and actively sought, rather than being passively accepted as donations; this often involves purchase costs. Every new acquisition, whether by purchase or donation involves ongoing stewardship costs. As our holdings increase, so do these expenses and we need your help to meet them by donations to our General Fund.

In 2013 we plan to pursue a further strategic acquisition, Babcock Ridge in North Stonington. Avalonia already owns a 25% interest in this property under the terms of a bequest by the late Ruth Goldsmith and we plan to purchase the remaining interest. As the map illustrates, this property lies between two existing preserves and its protection will establish an uninterrupted woodland block of approximately 180 acres, protecting the watershed of the Shunock River and establishing a wildlife corridor. In addition to its inherent ecological value, the property has recreational potential: hiking trails are planned linking to the existing trails of the Henne Tract.

When our Annual Appeal letter arrives in your mailbox, please give generously, either to the conservation of Babcock Ridge, to the stewardship of our existing holdings via our General Fund, or by dividing your donation between the two.

We are counting on you to help us to accomplish our shared mission.



Map of North Stonington showing the location of the planned Babcock Ridge acquisition (in red) and illustrating how it abuts existing open space, held by Avalonia (in green), Erisman Woodlands to the north and the Donald R Henne Memorial Tract of the Shunock River Preserve to the south.

Poquetanuck Cove Conservation Action Plan Update

by Jean Pillo

Between the towns of Ledyard and Preston is a two mile long extension of the Thames River locally known as Poquetanuck Cove. This embayment includes a small but significant tidal marsh owned by Avalonia Land Conservancy. Poquetanuck Cove has been described as the best-preserved brackish water cove of the Thames River estuary. Other cove abutters include The Nature Conservancy's 234 acre Poquetanuck Cove Preserve in Ledyard and a 35 acre coastal access property owned by the CT DEEP on the Preston side. Today, local land owners and visitors alike enjoy a healthy mosaic of natural resources in a peaceful setting due to the past efforts of conservation-minded folks too many to be named in this article. During the current conservation action planning process, several remaining threats to this system were identified, and strategies were developed to reduce those threats. Local residents and land-use officials working with conservation professionals from a wide range of backgrounds worked together to develop short-term and long term action strategies to address the threats. An example of a short-term strategy is to educate cove abutters about back yard best management practices and septic tank management to reduce water pollution in the cove. A long term strategy is to replace the undersized road culverts under Route 2A that reduce the tidal flow to the north side of the highway and will act as a barrier to tidal marsh migration as the sea levels rise. All this information is now being woven into a Poquetanuck Cove Conservation Action Plan by the Eastern Connecticut Conservation District (ECCD), which has been able to take the lead on this project thanks to



Aerial view of Poquetanuck Cove. Photo by Roger Wolfe, CT DEEP

funding provided by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation as part of the Long Island Sound Study.

ECCD has been working with town officials on both sides of the cove to finalize a plan they can incorporate into each town's Plan of Conservation and Development. In addition, a community survey to determine current interest and understanding of Poquetanuck Cove is being developed. **As land owners in Poquetanuck Cove, all Avalonia Land Conservancy members are encouraged to participate in this survey.** The survey will be open through February 28, 2013. To participate in this survey online, please enter <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/Y22LTM9> into your web browser. Paper copies will also be available at the Preston and Ledyard Town Halls and in local libraries.

Jean Pillo is Watershed Conservation Coordinator for ECCD

For more information about the Poquetanuck Cove Conservation Action Plan process and outcomes, please contact Jean at 860-928-4948 or email Jean.Pillo@ConserveCT.org.

Book recommendation

by Anne Roberts-Pierson



Please consider reading “The Wild Duck Chase, Inside the Strange and Wonderful World of the Federal Duck Stamp Contest,” by Martin J. Smith. 2012, Walker & Company, New York.

This is not a novel, but a real story about the Federal Duck Stamp program, which since 1934 has raised funds for, and awareness of, conservation. An annual contest is held to design the stamp.

Mention of duck stamps may bring to mind hunting licenses and duck hunting. Indeed, in that, you are correct; but the stamp’s potential as a wonderful source of American conservation revenue through purchase by hunters and *non-hunters* alike is tremendous.

After reading this very interesting book, as I did, you may want to purchase a beautiful duck stamp for yourself and others right away! For \$15, on-line or at your local post office, it is a great gift for that someone who has everything, while at the same time increasing funding for conservation. As an added benefit, the stamp also covers admission fees to National Wildlife Refuges.

New Years Resolutions? Consider Volunteering

by Janice Parker

Avalonia is always seeking volunteers, from arborists to zoologists, from bookkeepers to web designers. While we can always use the services of people willing to head out into the woods with loppers and chainsaws, it may surprise you to know that we can also use a number of skills perhaps not normally associated directly with land conservation. We would like to hear from accountants, insurance adjusters, desktop publishers, financial planners, marketing mavens and event planners, to name but a few. In most cases we will just be needing to draw on your skills as a consultant, and you will not be asked to make any major commitment of time. Don’t be deterred if your expertise is not amongst those mentioned; if you are willing to help, we will find a niche that fits. Give us a call 860 884 3500 or email avalonialc@yahoo.com.

Avalonia Dog Policy

by Joellen Anderson

Avalonia has been fielding an increasing number of complaints about loose dogs on Avalonia properties. Visitors report being approached, barked at and jumped on by off leash dogs and this is often intimidating and perceived as aggressive.

Many people fear dogs, small children and many less able hikers are at risk of being unbalanced. In addition, not all dog owners remove their dogs waste from the area and this especially problematic when it is left on the trails. Every person on our trails has the right to a peaceful, safe and enjoyable experience.

In addition, off leash dogs pose a threat to the habitats we are striving to protect. Ground nesting birds and mammals are perceived as prey and are flushed and disturbed. Protected vernal pools and streams are invaded when dogs are roaming away from their owners on the trails. It is the mission of Avalonia to protect these natural habitats.

If you are a dog owner and want to continue to enjoy the lovely Avalonia Trails with your four legged companions, we respectfully ask that you keep your dogs on leash, for the protection and safety of all, and remove all waste promptly. If you notice a loose dog, be a good steward on behalf of Avalonia and remind its owner of the posted leash policies.

Everyone thanks you for your cooperation and wish you happy trails.

Avalonia welcomes new and renewing members!



Renew online using your credit card:

www.avalonialandconservancy.org

Click “Donors & Members info”

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Choose membership level:	Individual \$25	Family	\$ 45
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		Organization	\$ 150

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

I want to help: outdoor work fundraising/PR solicit new members

event planning other work (please specify).....

I would prefer to receive my newsletter by email:

.....

Note: Dues, gifts of land, securities and other contributions are tax-deductible within the limits of the law.



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Avalonia now has a Facebook page:



Upcoming Events

Sunday, January 13, 1 p.m. Hike Avalonia's Moore Woodlands and the Town of Groton's Beebe Pond trails in Mystic. Meet at Moore Woodlands Capstan Avenue cul-de-sac entrance. Hike difficulty is medium to difficult depending on trail conditions: some level ground, but also a stream crossing, wet areas and bolder fields. Time: 1.5-2 hours. Dress appropriately for the weather. Bad weather or trail conditions cancels. Cider and cookies at hike's end. One dog on leash will be allowed at the rear of the group. Call 860 445 2563 to register.

Saturday, February 23, 9 a.m. Work party at Parke Memorial Preserve, Babcock Road, North Stonington, weather permitting. Call to check: 860 535 1541.

Stonington Plan of Conservation & Development Survey. Stonington is conducting a survey of residents and other interested parties to provide their views for the future of our community; it is available online at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/StoningtonPOCDquestionnaire> This is a chance for you to voice your views about the future vision you have for Stonington. Naturally, Avalonia advocates setting aside land to be retained in its natural state so future generations can walk our trails, see our tress, watch the birds, breath fresh air, and feel the presence of nature about them. Stonington open space land is rapidly disappearing under developmental pressures, so time is of the essence. Please take a few minutes to complete the survey and support us in preserving some of what remains.