



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

Paffard Woods Preserve

Property Management Plan

North Main Street
Stonington, New London County, Connecticut

Stonington Town Committee is responsible
for 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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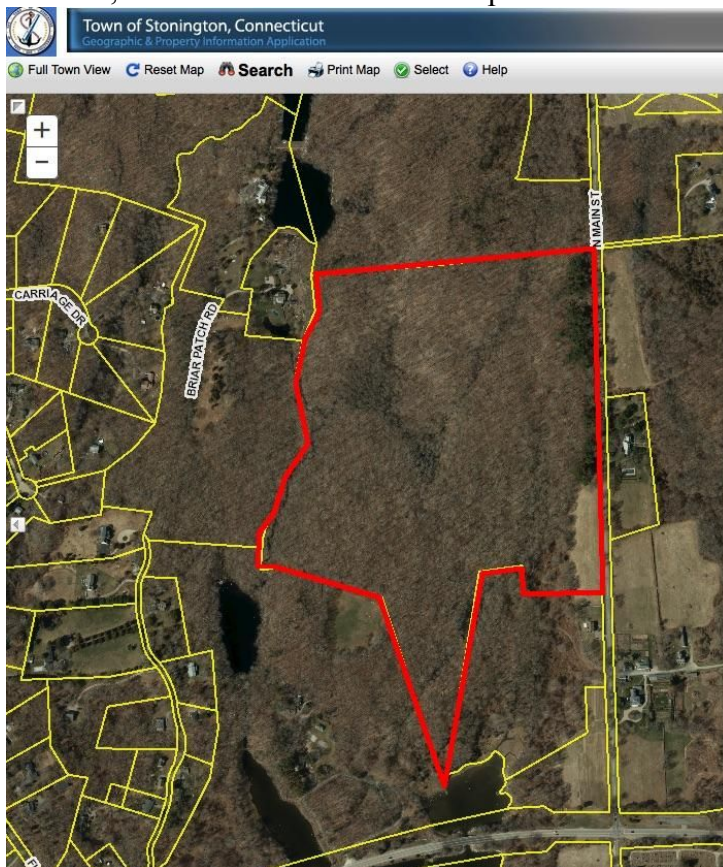
SUMMARY

This plan is one property on North Main Street in Stonington, CT. This is a trailed property mainly consisting of mixed woodlands and wetlands. See the photos and map that follows. Visitors are welcome.

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, by phone at 860-884-3500, and has a website at <http://www.avalonialandconservancy.org>.

HISTORY

The Paffard Woods Preserve is located in the Town of Stonington south-central area of town. A U. S. Navy Recreation Area (limited access to Navy personnel or other invited guests) is to the southwest, a residential / small farm parcel to the south, a residence to the northwest and an undeveloped (but sale pending as of December 2015) parcel to the north. Stony Brook runs along the west border.



SITE INFORMATION

The property

A parcel map of the property from the Town of Stonington GIS database is shown to the left. The property is identified as Map/Book/Lot/Unit 98-1-4. GIS acreage is roughly 62.16 acres.

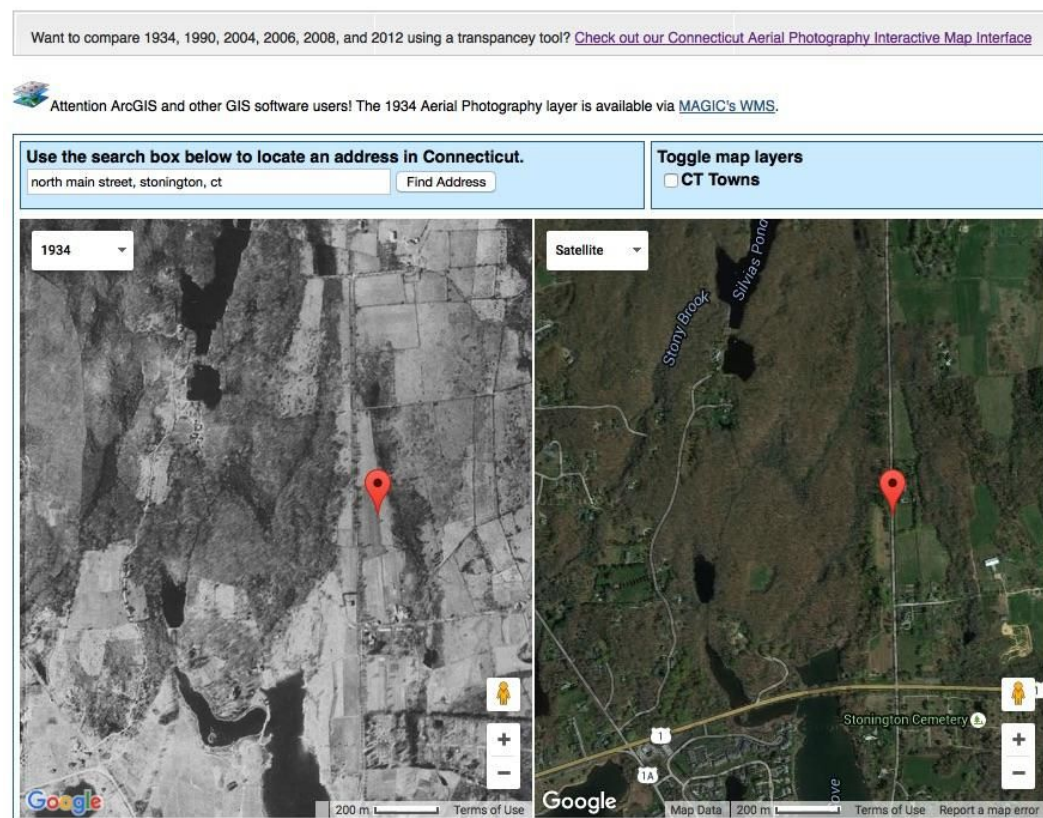
Acquisition history

This property was purchased as a bargain sale from Edith R. Paffard in August 2003. This was the first property that Avalonia raised funds for and a CT DEEP Open Space Wetlands and Land Acquisition Grant was obtained for a large portion of the purchase. As with all OSWL projects, CT DEEP holds a conservation easement on the property.

Land use history

The land is pretty much unchanged since 1934. Other neighboring parcels that were open farmland have been developed into residential housing on large parcels, though some farmland / pasture land remains.

Neighborhood Change in Connecticut, 1934 to Present



Public use resources

The property is open to the public for all standard Avalonia passive recreational activities, and is a popular spot for dog walking. Trail maps are present on property at trail intersections. There are Geocache sites on property.

Public benefit of the protected property:

The majority of the preserve is wooded uplands with a central low wetland with intermittent stream and vernal pools. The northern wetlands are in CT NDDB areas as is the far southern portion of the preserve along the cove.

The Preserve is trailed with a major outer loop with a central cross trail. Footbridges span sensitive wetland areas. The most southern part of the preserve has a spur trail that goes over rocky outcrops and drops down to a salt marsh at the edge of a tidal cove. From here there are good wildlife watching opportunities for Herons, Egrets, waterfowl and Osprey. This area is also in the CT NDDB area as is all of the Quana Duck Cove.

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 woodlands are dominated by Oaks and Beech with Red Maple in wetland. The Beech show signs of the fungal Beech Bark Disease, spread by a scale insect and affecting most populations in this area. Many have died creating thickets of young root sprouts and left snags supporting various woodpecker species. The woods are of varied ages with a number of mature trees as well as second growth. Many larger trees have hollows at base as well as higher up providing denning and nesting sites. The main area was probably not used agriculturally due to uneven terrain and numerous rocky outcrops, ledges and glacial erratics. Some of the outcrops have crevices and small openings that would provide more denning areas for larger mammals. Coyotes, Foxes, Fishers and Bobcats have been reported in this area. This habitat also hosts several pairs of Worm-eating Warblers each year, whose populations are decreasing in Connecticut.

There are two White Pine grove areas on the property near the North Main Street boundary. These provide a nice diversity of habitat but they were severely damaged in the storms of 2012-2013. Most deadwood and blow-downs were allowed to stay in place unless they blocked trails or were deemed dangerous. Brush piles were made for wildlife in several areas.

The central low wetland areas have varied understory for cover, but also has a great deal of Japanese Barberry along the waterway. Much of the upland woods has minimal understory as Deer have grazed it out.

Stony Brook forms the western boundary. This stream flows from Sylvia's pond to the north which is a man made and dammed body of water and flows south into the Admiral Fife Naval recreation area into another dammed mill pond with no fish access from tidal cove to the south. As such, this stretch of brook likely has no native anadromous fish.

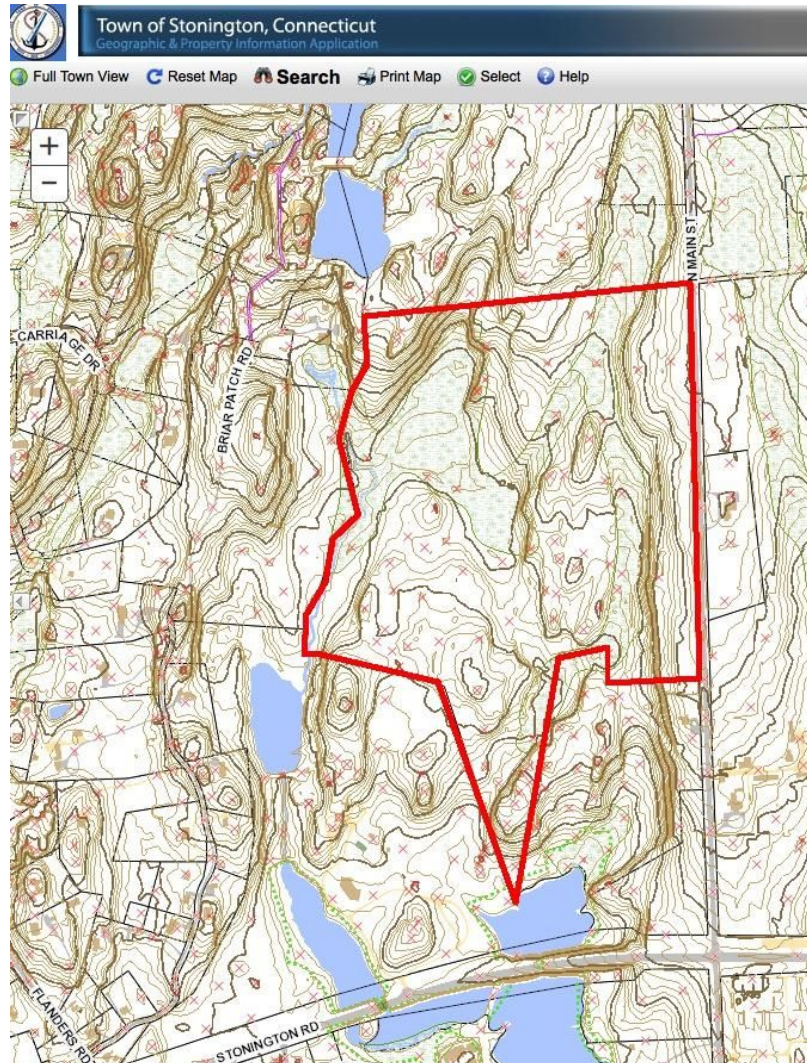
Sylvia's Pond has a known population of state listed Featherfoil (*Hottonia inflata*) and this plant has been noted intermittently in vernal ponds within Paffard Woods.

There is discussion about possibly removing dam at Sylvia's Pond which would impact flow of Stony Brook, but likely with positive results. A dam farther down, in Admiral Fife Naval Reserve would be the last obstacle to free flowing stream.

The more southern portion of the main property has been closer to human usage over the decades and is more impacted with non-native invasive plants. (Bittersweet, Honeysuckle, Barberry, Multi-flora Rose, Tree of Heaven) The field along North Main Street has been kept as meadow by yearly mowing. In November 2014, an agreement was reached with Stone Cottage Farm to use the field for agriculture beginning with the 2015 growing season (see appendix for agreement).

Potential threats to conservation values: At this time there are no immediate threats or plans for development in surrounding areas. Development around Sylvia's Pond could affect water quality. Further overgrowth of invasive Japanese Barberry could be a greater problem if it increases tick populations.

ELEVATIONS / WETLANDS



SPECIAL FEATURES AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

Much of the property is in CT DEEP Natural Diversity Database areas (see above). It also contains some interesting rock formations, erratics, ledge, and outcrops representative of the glacial activity in this area.

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:

- ☒ Corner monuments/pins found
- ☒ Boundary signs posted

A roadside sign is present. Standard boundary signs have been posted. CT DEEP required signage and wording is posted. Standard Avalonia visitor regulation signs posted.

The management objective for this property is to leave it in its natural state as protected open space and allow continued public access.

An annual walk around the boundaries of the properties is required. Yearly surveillance should be conducted. All motorized vehicles are prohibited on the properties except for maintenance.

Maintaining properties appearance

Litter control. Dumping in parking lot area has been an ongoing problem. Town of Stonington

highway officials have been helpful in removing larger dumped items. Keeping brush cut between parking area and roadway makes police surveillance easier. Graffiti was painted on rock formations years ago and was dealt with through police / court system.

Smaller signs at trail head, including DEEP signage, have been vandalized and could use replacing as needed.

Trail maps are present.

Maintenance of walls along North Main Street has been a priority. Work parties to continue to work on downed pine trees in groves along road would be helpful to maintain appearance.

Public use

The preserve is open to the public for passive recreational. 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. Camping is not allowed. Dogs must be kept on a leash no longer than 7 feet long, though this rule is regularly ignored. Visitors are not allowed to pick vegetation or disturb wildlife excessively.

Enhancing wildlife habitat(s) .

Leaving broken and downed trees as brush piles and snags, provides shelter for birds and small mammals. It is unlikely that there will be any significant forestry management efforts on this property, but replanting in the White Pine grove might be desirable to maintain the diversity after storms destroyed larger trees. Seedlings can be protected from deer grazing.

It would be beneficial to have an Environmental Review done to further identify if any other State-listed species are present on property

Controlling invasive species

Removal of invasive species by manual means will be accomplished as resources permit. The most significant invasive on the property is Japanese Barberry which follows the low wetlands and is thickest at the southern end of the main property. A significant effort would be needed to remove the plants by mechanical or approved herbicide applications. It would be beneficial to attempt this control as Barberry has been associated with increased Lyme Disease-carrying ticks.

Erosion control and flooding

A small portion of the property will flood with sea level rise. In times of heavy rainfall, Stony Brook often floods.

Productive uses

Wildlife habitat, hiking trails and farming (see Special Management Considerations below). Protection of the Stony Brook.

Scientific and educational activities

None planned at present though various groups have used the preserve for their programs.

Response to large natural disasters

Removal of any hazards will be undertaken as necessary.

Special management considerations

In 2014, Heidi Paffard-Simmons put forth a proposal to use the south field of Paffard Woods for an expansion of their sustainable farming venture Stone Cottage Farm. As the Paffard Woods was purchased with CT DEEP Open Space Wetlands and Land Acquisition Grant, the DEEP was consulted and permission granted as agriculture was a permitted use of the open space. Certain considerations were required, the most significant being that the spur trail would remain along the northwest end of the field to allow the public to view the field and wildlife. Some crops would be left on site to attract wildlife. The owners would maintain the fields and stonewalls along the roadside. They may sell the produce they raise on the plot, but it may not be sold on the site itself. See attached document for further details.

IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

Recurring and occasional requirements

Stonington Town Committee members visit the site on a regular basis. Frequent check of parking area for litter control and dumping, is needed.

Annual obligations

A boundary walk around the outside perimeter the property is required. Maintain contact with

Stone Cottage Farm and review regulations, to ensure public access is open through end of field.

Short term plan (1 – 5 years)

Annual boundary walk. Roadside cleanup. Parking lot maintenance, and brush removal to ensure visibility into lot. Installation of handrail on log bridge over stream.

Long term plan (5+ years)

Monitor site. Review Stone Cottage Farm lease. Control invasive Japanese Barberry in wetland areas.

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>.

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

II. Stone Cottage agreements follow.

CT DEEP approval:

Paffard Woods OSWA-240, 2002

Gerry (Stefon),

Thank you for informing the Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (DEEP) of an interest in and use of the Paffard Woods project area. As you are aware the State holds a Conservation Easement on the 62.160 ac. that make up this property. Within this Conservation Easement the use of the property for agricultural purposes are allowed, especially if they have been of a historic nature. The area you are planning on using or allowing use of, is a 2 acre section with frontage along North Main Street. The parcel has been cleared and is being used or managed as an open (non-forested) field. There are currently no public trails within this area so the use of this area for agriculture would not interfere with public access.

In review, DEEP does not see the agriculture use, or the management of this 2 acre field for such purposes as a violation of the terms and conditions of Conservation Easement. The planned activities may be carried out by Avalonia Land Trust or, by agreement with a second party. This interpretation is made with the following assumptions; that the planned activities does not limit public access to the remainder of the property during the growing season, that only the existing 2 ac. is used for agriculture, and that any produce grown within this area is not sold on the property but taken off site.

Should you have any question regarding the findings of this review, please feel free to contact me.

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