



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 2017

Avalonia Achieves National Accreditation

by Dennis Main

At a time of political change, one thing is clear and consistent: Americans strongly support saving the open spaces they love. Since 1968, Avalonia Land Conservancy, Inc., has been doing just that for the people of southeastern Connecticut and beyond. In February Avalonia achieved national recognition, joining a network of accredited land trusts recognized by the Land Trust Alliance (LTA).



Avalonia's Executive Director, Heather Milardo, said "It is an honor to receive accreditation from an esteemed organization like the LTA. We are incredibly proud of how far we have come and are looking forward to the future of, not only our land trust, but of the communities in which we serve. As we look toward our 50th anniversary next year, it feels good to know that we are going into the next 50 years as a nationally recognized organization with a clear vision and a strong foundation."

"Accreditation demonstrates Avalonia's commitment to the best practices and standards of land conservation in perpetuity throughout its mission area of southeastern CT," said Dennis S. Main, President. "This significantly raises the bar of our level of performance as we prepare to embark on significant new acquisition and fundraising activities." Acquisitions Chair and Vice President, Sue Sutherland, said "The amazing effort required to complete the LTA application for a complex regional land trust like Avalonia truly transformed the organization."

The LTA Commission's award of accreditation signifies its confidence that Avalonia's lands will be protected forever. "It is exciting to recognize Avalonia with this distinction," said Tammara Van Ryn, Executive Director of the Commission. "Accredited land trusts are united behind strong ethical standards, ensuring the places people love will be conserved forever. Accreditation recognizes Avalonia has demonstrated sound finances, ethical conduct, responsible governance, and lasting stewardship."

Avalonia is one of 1,363 land trusts across the United States according to the most recent National Land Trust Census, released December 1, 2016 by LTA. This comprehensive report documents the achievements of accredited land trusts:

- They have steadily grown and now steward a large percentage of conservation lands and easements held by all land trusts.
- From 2010 to 2015, they protected five times more land than un-accredited land trusts
- They have stronger systems and more resources to steward and defend their conservation lands forever.
- They have, by demonstrating and documenting their commitment to professional excellence in conservation, improved the public's trust in land conservation organizations, and thereby have helped to win support for federal, state and local conservation funding measures.

Avalonia had to provide extensive documentation and undergo a comprehensive review as part of its accreditation application, an effort that involved many, many hours of work by many, many volunteers. This effort reflects our commitment as an organization to YOU, our members, donors, and supporters; as well as our commitment to preserve our lands according to the highest standards, forever.

We are YOUR land trust.



Excellence · Trust · Permanence

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS
2016-2017**

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Dennis Main.....President
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Richard Conant
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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Heather Milardo

HONORARY DIRECTORS

Carole Clark
Anne Nalwalk
Lois Tefft Van Deusen

President's Update

Happy Spring to our Avalonia Family: Members, Friends and Supporters!!!! It has continued to be a very successful and exciting year for Avalonia with our formal Land Trust Alliance (LTA) accreditation announcement in February. We look forward to Avalonia being recognized at the LTA Annual event in October 2017 in Colorado.

We also look forward to honoring past donors and founders at our Avalonia Annual Meeting June 22, 2017. Along with the rest of the Annual Meeting program, we will be highlighting our evolving Acquisition and Perpetual Stewardship Capital Plan. We currently are working on an identified short term (1-5 year) potential acquisition portfolio of roughly \$7.5million of properties covering approximately 2000 acres. Given the nature of real estate negotiations, much of the detail is confidential until contracts are negotiated, approved by the Board, and signed. However, I can disclose that Avalonia has a signed contract to acquire a fantastic 409-acre parcel that lies partially in the towns of Preston, Griswold and North Stonington. This will mark the single largest fee-owned tract that Avalonia has ever procured and is an extremely important swath of the "Last Green Valley" corridor. By contrast, the next largest Preserve that Avalonia has added, the Pine Swamp Corridor, is 389 acres and is made up of a series of 6 parcels procured over several years. We also have a signed contract for an additional 86 acre environmentally rich and historically significant parcel in North Stonington. This property has nearly 2000 feet of critical riverfront.

The overall parameters of the Capital Plan include property donations, purchases, grants, and fundraising. The precise amounts are constantly in flux as grants are announced, donation pledges and amounts are received, contracts are negotiated, closings occur and new potential properties are identified. Development Committee Chair Richard Conant is heading our fundraising planning and implementation efforts and the fundraising is expected to fully fund (through our Endowment Fund) perpetual Stewardship projected costs as are being identified by the Stewardship Committee and Chair Karen Askins for all our properties and to cover any remaining matching costs for the current proposed acquisitions.

Under the guidance of Chair Mike Pernal, the Governance Committee reviewed and recommended updates for various Governance documents as appropriate including improvements to our by-laws which are being implemented by our Board. These include bringing our fiscal year into line with the calendar year which will greatly simplify our budgeting, accounting and reporting efforts. It also expands the Board in accordance with the annual self-assessment action plan to bring additional talent to the Board and staggered Board terms to bolster continuity and succession planning.

Please put June 22, 2017 on your calendar for the Annual Meeting to celebrate with us!!

Dennis S. Main,
President

STANDING COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Acquisition.....Sue Sutherland
Communications.....Michele Fitzpatrick
Development.....Dick Conant
Finance.....Sue Sutherland
Governance.....Mike Pernal
Personnel.....Dick Conant
Stewardship.....Karen Askins

TOWN COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Griswold.....Dick Conant
Groton.....Michele Fitzpatrick
Ledyard.....Karen Askins
Preston.....Bob Chapin, Margaret Gibson
Stonington.....Beth Sullivan
North Stonington.....Pat Turner

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Executive Director's Report

It is with sadness that I announce that I will be moving on from Avalonia. I have had a wonderful three and a half years with you all and have enjoyed my time as your Executive Director. Alas, time is short, though, and I find that I am needed elsewhere. In part, I will be working on bringing science education to my son's elementary school as well as assisting a few other non-profits that can benefit from my experience. You will be in great hands though! We are in the process of interviewing several highly qualified and eager candidates. We have recently reorganized a bit though and the new staff member coming on will be joining you as the Director of Development and Programs. Avalonia has a strong working Board of Directors and we felt that one of the greatest needs at this time was fundraising so we have decided to focus more on the aspect...especially with so many new possible land acquisitions in the pipeline!

It has been an honor to have shared so many accomplishments with you. We made huge strides in developing and growing our organization and saw major progress in our ability to administer what is becoming one of the largest land trusts in the state. We have increased our visibility within our communities, expanded our outreach and educational programs, achieved LTA accreditation, and enjoyed some great events together – both on land and at sea. Thank you for the chance to experience this journey with you and I can't wait to see all the amazing things that Avalonia will accomplish in the coming years.

Frank M. Marks

Annual Meeting

Thursday , June 22 at 6 p.m.

Project O building, UConn Avery Point campus
Room 243, second floor.

Our business meeting and election of the Board of Directors for 2018 will be followed by our program speaker. Light refreshments will be served.

Speaker: Jeff Cordulack

Executive director, Northeast Organic Farming Association
Organic garden and composting techniques

Please use the second entrance for Avery Point and park in parking area D.

Winter Gathering

by Michele Fitzpatrick

The weather could have been better, but everything else about our Winter Gathering was good. Volunteers assembled a sumptuous pot-luck spread, the Avalonia Quicksteppers entertained us with their music, and author Russ Cohen educated us about foraged foods. Who knew so many invasive plants are edible? Maybe next year the spread will include strawberry-knotweed pie. The silent auction and basket raffle added to the fun, while also more than covering our costs.

Next year will be our 50th anniversary and we want to make our Winter Gathering a celebratory birthday party to remember. If you would like to help us make next year's gathering extra-special, please share your ideas. We look forward to hearing from you, and don't want to wait till next year before we see you again!



Acquisition Committee Update

by Sue Sutherland

I'm happy to say that the Avalonia Acquisition Committee is very busy, currently working on acquiring properties in eight towns! We visit each potential acquisition and evaluate it for land and water resources, habitat value and connectivity to other preserved space among other factors. We also consider the potential cost of stewarding the land in perpetuity which can be a significant expense. A detailed assessment is made of each property with each criterion scored.

Where does the list of potential parcels for acquisition come from? In most cases, conservation-minded landowners have contacted Avalonia wishing to preserve their land, sometimes as an addition to lands already donated to Avalonia. These landowners have observed and enjoyed the wildlife and beauty of their properties for years and now want to preserve the land forever. This action speaks louder than any words about Avalonia's fifty year history of growth as the regional land trust which has been chosen to protect and steward these gifts.

Another case is when an investor wishes to divest of a parcel. The investor may make contact with a State organization such as the Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC), which will refer the person to Avalonia. Avalonia enjoys a close relationship with CLCC and, with our regional mission scope, this has identified major projects slated for acquisition.

Finally, the wider Avalonia membership may propose an acquisition. It's wonderful that this large group is thinking about which lands should be preserved, cultivating landowners for years, noticing for sale signs and keeping up with local property news. This has also resulted in several significant acquisitions.

In the next newsletter, I plan to describe some examples of current projects. If you know of any potential acquisition candidates, or are interested in joining our team, please do not hesitate to contact me at suesutherland@snet.net.

Challenge Grant

by Heather Milardo

We are over halfway through the fundraising period for our current Challenge Grant and we still have a ways to go. If you have not received a direct mailing and would like to learn more, please call us at 860-884-3500. If you are able to make a gift and help us reach our goal, please visit our website at www.avalonialandconservancy.org and click on the Donate Now button. All donations are tax deductible and your support makes a huge difference in our abilities to conserve and protect our environment – especially when you can do it now and see your support doubled. If you have already contributed to the Challenge appeal, we thank you for your donation!

Avalonia Celebrates! 50 Years of Conservation

by Janice Parker

To implement a program of events, program, and celebrations worthy of this milestone, we have created an Anniversary Committee and we want YOU to be a part of it. Please send us your ideas, or learn more by joining us at our next meeting. If you would like to be involved, please contact us. Everyone is welcome. How would YOU like to celebrate? Please let us know.

Also, if you have any photographic prints, 35mm positive slides or other materials documenting Avalonia over the years, please consider sharing them. We are looking for 'historical' pictures of people, our preserves, either aerial or on the ground, groups of people hiking together, past presidents, officers etc. We will be happy to digitize selective and representative 35mm positive slides, prints etc, if you cannot do so yourself.. If you have any fun or interesting stories to share about your involvement with Mashantucket/Avalonia, please send them along. We look forward to seeing and sharing them.

Book Alert!

by Jade Huguenin

Mystic: Postcard History by Jade Huguenin and Martin Smith chronicles over a century of Mystic heritage using local antique postcards,

though two cards in particular were a mystery that led them not to books for a solution- but to Avalonia. The first was a colorful 1908 portrait of three African-Americans and a white dog perched atop a rocky ledge outside a small cave, with a nondescript white sign nailed to a tree above them, reading “BLUFFS.” The caption: “The Wolfs Den, Dean’s Mill Park.” The second was even older- a 1901 portrait of a bulky rock formation with a trail leading to its flat surface that loomed above a still body of



water, the caption to which read “Mistuxet Rock, Mystic, Conn.” Jade and Martin were aware of the former Deans Mill Park, but not of the Wolf’s Den or Mistuxet Rock. After research yielded nothing in the way of documented history on

either landmark, they were directed to Avalonia steward Beth Sullivan, who immediately recognized the glacial outcrops as two distinct locations that can both be seen from Avalonia trails. After visiting and identifying the two sites, the match was confirmed, and the mystery was resolved. Thanks to Avalonia stewards’ knowledge and familiarity of the natural landscapes, two historic landmarks have been rediscovered and officially catalogued in the growing documented body of history of Mystic, Connecticut. The marriage of local nature conservancy and historic research is often overlooked, but cannot be understated; the value of Avalonia’s efforts to preserve Connecticut’s natural environment for years to come is priceless.

Barrett Eagle Scout project completed



Eagle Scout candidate John Drago has completed his project at the Barrett Preserve. He has installed a new wooden bridge over the stream on the east side of the property, rerouted a section of the trail to access it, and installed a wooden bench next to the stream. He did an excellent job, as you can see from this photograph.

Happy Birthday, Anne!

In April Avalonia's very own Anne Nalwalk celebrated her 80th birthday.



Anne has been active in Avalonia for 40 years, including 34 years on the Board and 22 as President. During her tenure as President, she was involved in the acquisition of more than 60 properties, 3 parcels of which she

donated herself. Her passion for conservation extended beyond Avalonia; for many years she served on North Stonington's Planning and Zoning Commission, and was active with the Flanders Nature Center. Her lifelong dedication to conservation was recognized at the Connecticut State Capitol on June 19, 2013.

Thank you, Anne, for all of your many, many contributions!

Membership Drive *by Heather Milardo*

Avalonia's Annual Membership Drive is underway. If you have already renewed, thank you! Membership in the organization makes up a huge part of our annual budget. Also, as we have recently changed our fiscal year to reflect the calendar year, your renewing membership will be good until December 2018! We hope we can count on your continued participation in this essential program. Avalonia would not exist without its incredible members.

We sincerely apologize if you received a membership renewal by mistake. We are experiencing some issues with our database and it appears some renewal notices were sent to members whose membership was not yet due for renewal. If you have questions as to whether or not your membership is current, please don't hesitate to call our office at (860) 884-3500. Again, please accept our profound apologies for this mixup.

Nominating Committee Update

The Nominating Committee, chaired by member Kassy White, is in the process of assembling a slate of candidates for the election to be held at our Annual Meeting on June 22. Given Avalonia's switch to a fiscal year that runs concurrent with the calendar, candidates elected at that time will start their terms in January 2018.

There are vacancies on the Board to be filled, and we are particularly interested in candidates who may have experience or interest in development or finance. However, the most important qualification is a commitment to conservation, and our organization can make use of a wide range of skills and interests, so do not hesitate to step up if you are interested.

In addition, we have multiple vacancies on our Standing Committees.

If you would like to be considered as a candidate, if you would like to recommend someone you know, or if you would just like to know more, please contact us (see page 2 for contact information). We look forward to hearing from you.

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.

Contact me about volunteer opportunities.



AVALONIA LAND CONSERVANCY. INC.

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

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Non-Profit Organization

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Mystic, CT

Permit No. 126

Avalonia has a Facebook page:



- Submit your email address to newsletter@avalonialc.org to receive our e-newsletter “Avalonia Now!” and notifications of impromptu events.



Upcoming Events

Saturday, June 3, 10am-12:30pm. CT Trails Day Hike. Explore the new Benedict Benson Preserve on a leisurely 1-mile nature walk. Meet at the trailhead parking area on Swantown Hill Road, North Stonington. Rain postpones to Sunday, June 4, same time. Pre-registration recommended: 860-599-4867 or fellnature@sbcglobal.net.

Saturday, June 3, 9:30am-1:30pm. CT Trails Day Hike. Groton’s Annual X-Town Trail hike, covering 6 miles over state, town, and land trust properties, from Bluff Point to Avalonia’s Town’s End. Meet at Bluff Point State Park, off Depot Road. Return transportation provided. Rain cancels. Pre-registration recommended: mwgoeolson@comcast.net or 860-917-2625.

Thursday, June 22. Annual Membership Meeting. Details on page 3.

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