



# Avalonia Trails

Winter 2018

*Celebrating 50 years of preserving natural habitats in southeastern Connecticut by acquiring and protecting lands and by communicating the value of these irreplaceable resources.*



Avalonia celebrating 50 years of protecting land, water, and wildlife in 2018!



*Glossy ibis searching the mud for crustaceans at Anderson Marsh. These birds, legendary for their bravery during hurricanes, are reputed to be the last sign of wildlife to take shelter before a hurricane hits and the first to reappear once the storm has passed. Photo by Rick Newton*



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## Board of Directors 2018

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Rick Newton.....	Treasurer
Sue Sutherland.....	Assistant Treasurer
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North Stonington.....	Pat Turner
Preston.....	Bob Chapin, Margaret Gibson
Stonington.....	Beth Sullivan
Western Towns.....	TBD

Website: [www.avalonialandconservancy.org](http://www.avalonialandconservancy.org)

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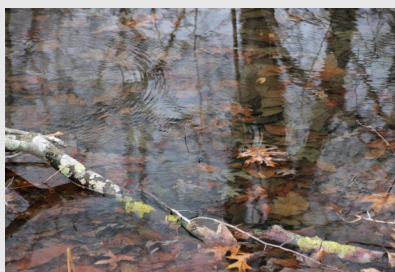
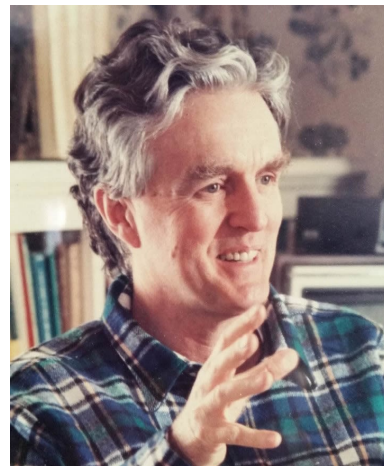
Office phone: 860-884-3500

Office hours: Tue. - Thu. 10 am - 2 pm

## In Memory of David McKain

The members, staff, and board of directors of the Avalonia Land Conservancy were saddened to learn of the passing of David McKain on December 27th after a long affliction with Alzheimer's disease. David and his wife, Margaret Gibson, have been Life Members of Avalonia for many years, served on the board, and stewarded properties. In 2008, they donated over nine acres in Preston known as the Gibson/McKain Songbird Preserve, which added to the then 230-acre Mitchell Preserve and Reed Woodlands. David, a published author and poet who was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize, was an avid walker, hiker, book collector, genealogist, builder of stone walls, and a passionate participant in the civil rights and peace movements. To read more about David, click [here](http://www.bradfordera.com/news/david-mckain-author-of-bradford-memoir-dies-at/article_1e781752-ec48-11e7-a3ce-9bd4851efaaa.html) or go to: [http://www.bradfordera.com/news/david-mckain-author-of-bradford-memoir-dies-at/article\\_1e781752-ec48-11e7-a3ce-9bd4851efaaa.html](http://www.bradfordera.com/news/david-mckain-author-of-bradford-memoir-dies-at/article_1e781752-ec48-11e7-a3ce-9bd4851efaaa.html)

We would like to extend our deepest sympathy to David's family for their loss and thank them once again for their generous contributions toward the conservation of southeastern Connecticut's natural resources. The family has asked that donations be made to Avalonia in lieu of flowers.



*Photos of the Gibson-McKain Songbird Preserve and veery by Beth Sullivan.*

## President's Update

It was another great year for Avalonia, tempered by the loss in 2017 of some giants among us, David McKain (p. 2) and Lois Tefft. We just received notice of three 2017 Open Space Watershed Land Acquisition (OSWLA) grants of almost \$1 million (p. 4) to acquire nearly 700 acres in three towns. Three more OSWLA grant applications were submitted on Feb. 1<sup>st</sup> to the Connecticut Dept. of Environmental Protection (CT DEEP) for assistance with another 400 acres in the upcoming 2018 grant round. We have entered into a three-year regional collaboration agreement with the Connecticut Land Conservation Council and seven other local land trusts (p. 5). Yet another collaborative effort resulted in the award of a second large grant for Dodge Paddock and Beal Preserve in Stonington (p. 6 -7). A \$50,000 foundation grant was received and additional grant requests are in the fundraising pipeline. A purchase price agreement was reached on an approximately 175-acre acquisition thanks to the transfer of another OSWLA grant of \$614,000 from a local land trust to ALC.



Photo by David Young

Pretty exciting and heady news above, much of which involves acquisitions. In brief, our mission boils down to three key words: “acquire,” “preserve,” and “educate.” As a Land Trust Alliance (LTA) accredited land trust, once Avalonia *acquires*, part of our *education* mission is to make sure that we *preserve* in accordance with the LTA Standards and Practices, 12B.1 Land Management and Stewardship:

1. *Develop a written land management plan for each conservation property within 12 months after acquiring the land to:*
  - a. *Identify the property's conservation values, including any significant cultural and natural features or those that have significant community value*
  - b. *Identify the overall management goals for the property*
  - c. *Identify activities to achieve the goals and to reduce any risks or threats to the conservation values*
  - d. *Specify the uses that are appropriate for the property, in keeping with the property's conservation values, any restrictions and donor or funder requirements*
    - i. *Provide public access opportunities as appropriate to the property and the land trust's mission*
2. *Manage each conservation property in accordance with its management plan, and review and update the plan as necessary*
3. *Perform administrative duties (such as paying insurance, filing required forms, keeping records) in a timely and responsible manner*
4. *Maintain the property in a manner that retains the land trust's public credibility, manages community expectations and minimizes risk*

These standards imply that a generic list of “can-” or “can’t-do’s” is insufficient. ALC needs management plans that are appropriate to each parcel’s natural and cultural values, that enable public access opportunities, and that provide for adequate stewardship. Membership participation (p. 4) in this process is vital because public access is generally *required* when public funding is involved. CT DEEP defines “passive recreation,” for example, as including biking, walking, and equestrian activities. In writing our management plans for pending large acquisitions which connect to greenways numbering in the hundreds of acres, it is important for us to engage community constituencies. To this end, ALC has already communicated and met with hiking and biking groups to develop collaborative opportunities. These not-for-profit chartered groups, like ALC, serve community interests, employ best practices and standards, and are conservation minded.

As ALC enters its second half-century as an organization, it is important to come together with our like-minded fellow constituents. A wonderful chance to continue that process happens this February 21<sup>st</sup>, 2018, at our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration at Mystic Aquarium (invitation on p. 8).

Dennis Main





## It's Time to Make a Difference ... Please Join or Renew Your Membership Today

Avalonia has launched its membership drive for 2018. We need you more than ever now. At a time when the environment is under so many pressures, your involvement is invaluable to us. Here's why:

- You make the difference when we apply for grants or go before local governments. They pay attention to us when we say we have over 1,000 local families who support us.

• You make the difference as a volunteer who maintains the trails and walks the boundaries. We could never get all the work done without you.

- Your membership helps to keep our air and groundwater clean now and for generations to come.
- Your membership supports the preservation of the land we all enjoy. Those Avalonia islands of refuge where we love to hike, walk the dog, or just enjoy the wildlife and scenery, are protected because of your support.

Our **50th anniversary** year confers some special membership privileges. You'll be invited to participate in several anniversary events, hikes, and fun "birthday gifts" given to Avalonia by some of our local partner conservation organizations. So *please* join or continue your membership. It's so important to us all. If you have already renewed, thank you! To become a member go to: <http://avalonialandconservancy.org/membership/>

*You do make a difference. Be a part of our growing conservancy. Renew or join today. Thank you!*



*OSWLA grants provide funding to protect wetlands like the above vernal pool on Avalonia's 74-acre Babcock Ridge, a 2014 OSWLA-assisted acquisition located in North Stonington. Vernal pools, a rapidly disappearing habitat, form in the late fall and early winter and serve as critical springtime breeding and nursery areas for spotted salamanders, wood frogs, fairy shrimp, and a wide variety of insects.*

## Avalonia Receives \$945,750 in Open Space Grants

Avalonia Land Conservancy has been awarded three grants from the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection's (CT DEEP) Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition (OSWLA) program totaling \$945,750. DEEP OSWLA funds enable conservation organizations and communities alike to acquire local, environmentally-significant land to ensure protection of clean water and viable wildlife habitats. All land purchased with DEEP grants must, in addition to protecting land, provide public access for passive recreation. It is important to note that OSWLA funds are generated from real estate transfer fees, not tax revenue. Grants can cover up to 65% of the land's acquisition price, but grant recipients are required to raise the remaining cost, as well as provide for stewardship funds, before closing on the property.

Three new properties totaling 674 acres will be acquired over the next one to two years. The largest acquisition, a 409-acre property, straddles three towns: North Stonington, Griswold, and Preston. The second, 87-acre property is located in North Stonington, and a third, 178-acre property is located in Preston. "These properties contain both conservation and historical value," said Dennis Main, president of Avalonia's board of directors. "They are in close proximity to other conserved lands and will protect groundwater and wildlife corridors." Each parcel will be open to the public as soon as possible after it is acquired, trails have been blazed, and management plans developed.

On February 1st, Avalonia's grant writers hand-delivered three new OSWLA grant applications to CT DEEP in Hartford hoping to protect four environmentally-significant properties totaling 367 acres in Ledyard and Griswold. (cont. p.5)

(cont. from p. 4) Avalonia currently owns or holds easements on approximately 100 properties totaling 3,500 acres located in eight towns within its 22-town southeastern Connecticut mission area. All Avalonia lands are protected in perpetuity for present and future generations. The new and prospective acquisitions represent a major step forward in a five-year plan to acquire over 2,000 additional acres.

## Grant Encourages Local Land Trust Collaboration

Avalonia and land trusts throughout New London County and Connecticut's eastern region will continue to benefit from a renewed three-year grant from the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut (CFECT). The grant, which allows the Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC) to continue its statewide "advancement initiative program," serves seven eastern-region land trusts including Avalonia, Colchester Land Trust, East Lyme Land Trust, Groton Open Space Association, Salem Land Trust, Waterford Land Trust, and Wyndham Land Trust. The program will enable participating land trusts to document and map their land holdings, as well as refine a collective vision for sustainable, regional strategic conservation planning and project implementation.

Avalonia President, Dennis Main, quoted in an article published in the Norwich *Bulletin* on December 2, 2017, said that "The current initiative will allow Avalonia to make dramatic improvements in our ability to further conserve our area's most valuable landscapes. The Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping project and direct technical assistance from CLCC staff .... will be critical in identifying those parcels and habitats most environmentally valuable."

CFECT Program Director, Jennifer O'Brien, also quoted in the article, said "I am very encouraged to see that this initiative is both expanding individual land trust capacity and creating opportunity for collaborative conservation work. The plan to develop a comprehensive GIS map of the region will be a tremendous asset in looking at the big picture of vulnerable lands in New London County and will guide conservation work well into the future."

## Outstanding Photo by David Young

What makes this an outstanding Avalonia photo? First, it is a compelling subject. Two Avalonia volunteers, one young, the other more senior, are participating in the banding of purple martin hatchlings at our Knox Preserve in Stonington. It is an expression of shared devotion to the nature that surrounds us. The joyful face on the tee shirt echoes our delight at seeing that adorable chick. This single picture communicates a complex message about Avalonia, nature, the fun of working together, the opportunities for volunteering, and the diversity of our members, the lifeblood of the organization.



Photo by Ron Voelkel, Avalonia member

But this image communicates well because it is also a great photo. It was taken with the camera set for high resolution allowing it to be enlarged and cropped for maximum effect. It is a great composition. The hands and fingers lead your eye around the picture, but always back to that irresistible focal point. Finally, all the important elements are in focus and the out-of-focus grassy background adds some color and seasonal awareness without being distracting.

Truly outstanding pictures usually emerge from a collection of mostly discards. Great nature photos almost always rely on the happy accident of being in the right place at the right time, but if we are mindful of camera settings, lighting and composition, we increase our chance of producing an Outstanding Photo.



## Ask and Ye Shall... Sometimes Get Really Lucky

by Beth Sullivan

First published Monday, December 4, 2017, in  
Avalonia e-Trails, a blog for the friends of  
Avalonia Land Conservancy



*Dodge Paddock and Beal Preserve make up the last open green space in Stonington Borough. Photo by D. Boyle*

If you have followed this blog, or read through Avalonia's website or newsletters, you will know that I have spent a lot of time and energy working at Dodge Paddock and Beal Preserve. These two preserves, together, create a gem of a space in Stonington Borough that many people don't even realize is there.



*As recently as 2006, the Preserve was dry enough to mow and Phragmites were contained to the wettest areas. Photo by J. Callahan.*

Tucked at the end of Wall Street, it is the last significant open green space in the borough featuring waving grasses and spectacular water views. It is also probably the most studied, most time consuming, most beloved, and most frustrating piece of property Avalonia owns. It is a compact example of a huge problem: the effects of climate

change such as sea level rise and ever more powerful storms. In just the last five years we have seen several hurricanes, winter storms, historic rainfalls, and summer droughts challenge this already fragile spot.

The small area has quite a diverse set of habitats and ecosystems. It has immediate direct ocean front exposure and small sandy pockets, as well as rocky shore and tide pools. There are areas of renewed and regenerating salt marsh, as well as areas that are often flooded by fresh-water rain runoff from storms and Borough streets. A large portion is more upland meadow—a small, but unique grassland with some shrubs growing in. It also has a greater share of invasive plants than any small parcel should host. All in all though, it is an amazing, beautiful spot, a great place to observe so many natural changes. All of which are being impacted severely by the changing climate.

**Hurricane Sandy** changed the landscape and the drainage forever. Since that time I have been writing about the research and work we are doing there to try and preserve the preserve. As a volunteer with no professional background in the complex issues at hand, I am gaining experience rapidly. I am truly lucky to have some great resources who have helped, mentored, educated and worked alongside me there and have made a huge difference.

We have received major assistance from CT DEEP in their continued efforts to keep drainage open, to help create an environment where a healthy salt marsh could re-establish and diminish the mosquito population. They also wage the battle on the invasive plants that threaten to overtake everything!



*We could never accomplish such tasks without DEEP assistance.*

Several years ago, with the Mystic Aquarium leading the charge, we were the beneficiaries of a big grant from the





*By 2012, Phragmites had filled the area. Non-native Phragmites, or the common reed, is an aggressive, perennial wetland grass that outcompetes native plants and displaces native animals.*

National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF). This got the community involved in studying the conditions there and planting native vegetation to give Mother Nature a boost at restoring the landscape once the Phragmites were removed and water flow established. We have had student groups from elementary age to college working to help plant, clear, clean, and study. We have had graduate students and their mentors from the New England Wild Flower Society studying the vegetation and providing seeds to help us restore natives as well.



*Previous grants provided funds for plantings and educational signage.*

Now, once again, we have been supported and rewarded with another big grant. I am thrilled to be able to let everyone know that because of the efforts and energies of Connecticut Sea Grant Program, and extension educator Dr. Juliana Barrett, we will be the beneficiaries of another Long Island Sound Futures Fund grant from the NFWF. We made so much progress with their previous support that when this new application crossed their desks, they were willing to give again to support the work we have accomplished.

With this grant, and with the oversight and guidance of Dr. Barrett who will administer the grant, we will have the

funds to finally get a professional engineering study done to assess what is the best way to protect the south shore from the ravages of storms and surges. Decades ago, no one recognized or truly anticipated the changes we are experiencing now. The hope is that this will give us a guide to follow for the next decades to come. She will help me revise the preserve's management plan to reflect these changes since the plan was first written five years ago.

With new plans in hand, hopefully we will find support and funding to execute them.

We will also get assistance with planning and restoring the area that was formerly Mrs. Beal's garden. We have to somehow reclaim the land and have decided that a bigger area of native plantings would be beneficial for the area and wildlife, can help filter water run-off, and also serve as an educational opportunity for people who visit. There will be growing numbers of residents along the coast who will be affected by rising waters and their homes' garden landscapes will be impacted.

I honestly believe that asking for help is the only way to make big things happen. But just as important is following through and showing your donors and benefactors that you will make the best use of their support.

Ask, and you may receive. Just be sure to be thankful and follow through.



*Juliana Barrett will administer the new grant but will also be by my side working in the field.*



*The restored Paddock will be healthy and even more beautiful.*



Avalonia Land Conservancy, Inc.  
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Non-Profit Organization

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## You're Invited to a 50th Anniversary Cocktail Reception!

- Wed., February 21, 5:30 – 7:30 pm (snow date Feb. 28)
- Mystic Aquarium, 55 Coogan Blvd., Mystic, CT
- Tickets, \$60 per person, may be purchased at the door, or faster and easier: online at [avalonialandconservancy.org/50th/](http://avalonialandconservancy.org/50th/)

Wine, beer, and amazing hors d'oeuvres (a carving station, Asian station, and chowder station) are included in the purchase price.

Connecticut's Department of Energy and Environmental Protection Commissioner Robert Klee will be the featured speaker.

Visit Avalonia's website [here](http://avalonialandconservancy.org).



**Avalonia eTrails**

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## Save Some Trees!

We are pleased to share this paper version of our newly-designed newsletter with all our members. We hope you will enjoy it. If you prefer to save some trees by subscribing to the electronic version only, please visit our website and let us know: <http://avalonialandconservancy.org/newsletter/>