



Avalonia Trails

Fall 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.



Then and Now...

Celebrating 50 years of preserving land



Photo by D. Young

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President’s Message: “State of the Land Trust”

There’s been nothing better for taking stock of a land trust organization than two recent experiences I’ve been a part of: the Land Trust Alliance accreditation process, which compelled us to look forward, and our 50th anniversary, which necessitated some looking back. As our 50th anniversary celebrations draw to a close, change and continuity have been on my mind.

Much has changed. We began as the Mashantucket Land Trust, changed to Avalonia Land Conservancy in 1995, and today we’re known simply as Avalonia. Technology has revolutionized communications and we’re adapting accordingly: We have a website featuring video postings recorded using cell phones; a Facebook page; Avalonia eTrails blog; Instagram account; and we send e-newsletter blasts to our membership regularly. Our Communications Committee is working on a redesign of our logo. A drone is being used to surveil one of our less accessible properties. Have you seen the wonderful new ARC GIS property maps on the website? The list goes on.

Nevertheless, our central mission as a land trust remains essentially the same. The Spring 1971 Mashantucket Land Trust (MLT) newsletter provides a powerful reminder of the continuity of our mission:

“...to promote for the benefit of the general public the preservation of the natural resources of the State of Connecticut.” Then comes a qualification. *“...We do not exist solely to acquire real estate and hold it in its natural state. With this in mind we have engaged in many other activities. Perhaps the most important of these is our arrangement with The Nature Conservancy whereby we manage the Pike property on its behalf. This involves, among other things, maintaining the bridle paths. The Pike property consists of 160 acres of woodland in Ledyard formerly owned by Mr. and Mrs. H. Harvey Pike.”*

The board very recently approved the transfer of this beautiful property from the Nature Conservancy to Avalonia. Pike comprises over 272 acres and will add a variety of opportunities for passive recreation on the preserve’s well-maintained trails. The closing on this property will bring Avalonia’s acquisitions total *since accreditation in February 2017 alone* —one and a half years—to over 1000 acres. In its first three years of existence (between 1968 and 1971), MLT preserved over 100 acres. One important reason for today’s accelerated rate of acquisition is our state’s generous open space grant program, in existence since 1998.

In closing, I am delighted to write that as we look forward to our 51st year, Avalonia is still going strong.




Avalonia Trails This biannual publication communicates Avalonia’s mission to “preserve natural habitats in our area by acquiring and protecting lands” with articles about Avalonia’s natural resources and the people who protect and enjoy them.

Editor and layout: Eugenia M. Villagra; Contributors: Dennis Main, Beth Sullivan, Chuck Toal, Eugenia Villagra, David Young; Photos: Richard Conant, Janice Parker, Beth Sullivan, Dennis Main, Eugenia Villagra, David Young. Map by Mike Goodwin.

Two Amazing New Acquisitions in Griswold!

In early September, Avalonia acquired 65 acres in the Town of Griswold adjacent to two other Avalonia properties. Together, these properties will be known as the **Dutka Nature Preserve** and will protect an ecosystem of high habitat value for wildlife and high recreational value for the community because of the access it provides to Pachaug Pond and to Avalonia's Burton Island in the pond.

Mary Dutka made the purchase affordable by generously donating 75% of the acreage in a "bargain" sale*. We have applied for a grant from the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection to help fund up to 65% of the sale cost under their Open Space Watershed Land Acquisition grant program. We will raise funds for the balance.



Photo by R. Conant

This acquisition expands the total conserved land (including Pachaug State Forest) to over 26,600 acres of greenway, nearly all of which is contiguous. Greenway creation is central to Avalonia's acquisition strategy and overall mission because of the critical role greenways play in protecting habitat, providing corridors for people and wildlife, improving water and air quality, serving as floodplains as well as environmental classrooms.

The land's forested and emergent freshwater wetlands bordering Pachaug Pond provide a welcome contrast to the well-developed shoreline. A stream runs through it and its large native-shrub wetlands support turtles, amphibians, and many birds. Bald eagles, owls, and hawks nest in the white pine forest area and a variety of native birds can be observed in the forest and native-shrub area by the pond. Extensive populations of migratory waterfowl utilize the pond in the winter. Fortunately, there are few invasive plants that need removal.

In another September bargain sale, Avalonia acquired a 54-acre piece of land in Griswold (on Rixtown Mountain Rd.) now known as **The Aurelie and Stanley Boyd Tract**. This beautiful forested ridgeline property, adjacent to Avalonia's recently-acquired 409-acre TriTown Forest Preserve (TTFP), connects to 790 acres of preserved agricultural and forest land protected by conservation easements held by the Nature Conservancy. The purchase also moves a developing greenway closer to a former YMCA farm camp and to Pachaug State Forest. The expanded greenway protects approximately 1,500 contiguous acres in Griswold, North Stonington, and Preston (see map inset).

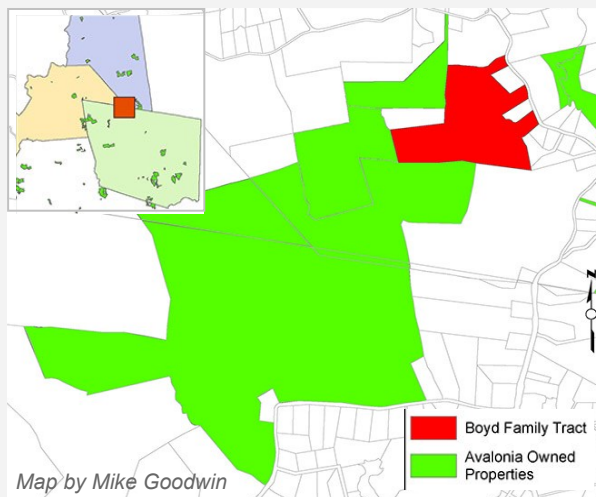
The property features the 530-foot Rixtown Mountain and is located within two significant watershed areas within the Thames River Basin of the Last Green Valley, a National Heritage Corridor. Watershed protection contributes to the health of Long Island Sound.

A rich mixture of wildlife habitats are found on the property. Numerous vernal pools, streams and wetlands can be found within an extensive forest which support many species. Amphibians and rare plants have been identified

at the top of Rixtown Mountain. Other habitats include rocky ledge, chestnut oak, upland forest, ponds, seeps, and an almost continuous cover of wildlife-sustaining shrubs including huckleberries and blueberries. The chestnut oak forest, high up on the property's many ridgelines, is particularly striking. Two of the chestnut oaks found there, according to our preliminary measurements, rank among the largest in Connecticut.



Photo by E. Villagra



Map by Mike Goodwin

*A bargain sale is the purchase of property for less than its fair market value. The difference between the fair market value and the sales price constitutes a charitable gift.

Avalonia Now: A New Perspective on Woolworth-Porter Marsh by Beth Sullivan



Stewardship of varied lands and habitats can be very challenging. Some places are impenetrable due to heavy (and often painful) vegetation; sometimes the habitats themselves are fragile; sometimes properties are so large that actual boundary walks are impossible to complete in one day.

Our goal as a land trust is to survey all our properties annually. In part it is to inspect boundaries, but there is so much more to keep track of: vegetation growth and health, project areas, wetlands, and areas off trails that are infrequently viewed. In the case of our beautiful coastal salt marshes, we have the added challenges of monitoring sea level rise and changes in the marsh and marsh migration in a very fragile environment.

Enter drone technology Together with Stonington resident and Avalonia member, David Young, we are working on ways to view some of our properties from

the air. Avalonia’s first drone video is of a salt marsh (still photo above) that lies between Lord’s Point and Wamphaussuc Point, a large portion of which is protected by us as the Woolworth-Porter Marsh.

This new technology enables us to more accurately assess where we may need to go in on foot for closer inspection and keep a record of changes over time to the salt marsh, one of our most fragile coastal assets. This video is the first of hopefully many more as we learn to fine tune the technology.



To view David’s video, click [here](#).

Read [Beth’s full article](#) in Avalonia eTrails.

Avalonia Then: Mashantucket Land Trust, Spring 1971



We helped raise money to save the Haley Farm in Groton and donated \$100 to this cause.
We helped raise money for the acquisition by The Nature Conservancy of the Cottrel Marsh on the shore between Mystic and Stonington.
We had an exhibit at the Ledyard Fair and at the Earth Day gathering on Avery Point in Groton.
We have opposed the creation of a leaching field at the Rest Area on Rt. I-95 in North Stonington. There will be no leaching field.
We also opposed the petition of Rykar Industrial Corp. filed with the Ct. Dept. of Agriculture and Natural Resources, for permission to fill and develop 277 acres of marsh land in Stratford. Commissioner Gill denied the petition but the petitioner is going to court to try to overrule Commissioner Gill’s decision.”

For it’s first 27 years, Avalonia was known as the Mashantucket (a Pequot word meaning well-wooded country) Land Trust. The first newsletter in our files dates back to Spring 1971, as seen on the masthead above with the familiar logo. An excerpt from that newsletter reveals a remarkably dynamic organization:

“There follows a partial list of our other [non-acquisition related] activities:

Annual Membership Ends in December: Renew Now!

Avalonia is seeking new members and requesting that all current members renew their membership for 2019. Avalonia recently revised its **membership policy; now membership for everyone expires at the end of the calendar year.** Those whose membership expired in the last half of 2017 were “grandfathered” into 2018, so it’s time for everyone, except Life members, to renew.

Membership is easy. Visit our website to sign up at avalonialandconservancy.org/membership/ at the Individual, Family, Supporter, or Patron level. Join more

than 900 families in southeastern Connecticut who are aware of how important it is to conserve our area’s most vital resources—land, water, and wildlife—now and for future generations. We’ll send reminders to all our members in December.

Thinking of gifts for the holidays? **Give a gift of Avalonia membership!** What could be more meaningful than the gift of clean water, air, and an interesting and wide variety of open spaces (100+ preserves totaling 4100 acres) to explore and protect for future generations. That’s a gift that keeps on giving!

Membership Then: “Without Such Members There Would Be No Trust.”

In the *Mashantucket Trails* September 1983 newsletter, president-elect Norman C. Smith wrote a lengthy “Message” describing his “aims” for the land trust at 15-years. One aim was to “stimulate growth of membership and more active member participation in the affairs of the Trust...”

“We must all be reminded that MLT is a membership organization—about 300 of us at the moment—and that membership participation is desirable, indeed required, for success. It is recognized that many members support the aims and purposes of the Trust and can do no more. Without such members there would be no Trust.”

Be a Friend of Avalonia



Photo by J. Parker

To preserve its hard-earned accreditation, Avalonia must be constantly on its toes, ready to demonstrate that we have properly stewarded our lands, maintained our records, and protected our land’s conservation values. This is no small task for a volunteer organization with over 100 preserves totaling nearly 4,100 acres. The plan is to assemble four new “teams”—Boundary Marking, Boundary Walking, Trail Maintenance and Record Keeping teams—who will jump in as needed to provide support to local town committees. Over the past six weeks, at least 30 new volunteers have signed up!

Team training began in September. Each team is led by an experienced “captain” who identifies areas of

need and matches those needs with volunteer availability. Team captains are experienced volunteers who are very familiar with our procedures, having hosted workshops and classes for first time volunteers before. Likewise, our new volunteers bring an amazing wealth of talents and skills with them. They include retired military, executives, teachers and even a 12-year old interested in surveying. They work collaboratively and strategically to keep our preserve boundaries clearly marked, ensure that there are no encroachments, maintain our trails, and organize and safely store our records.

Would you like to join them? If so, go to avalonialandconservancy.org/volunteering/ to learn more or click on the teams links at left.



Photo by J. Anderson

Volunteers in Focus by Eugenia Villagra



Photo by E. Villagra

On one of the most oppressively hot and humid days of the summer of '18, Avalonia volunteers John Ackley and I arrived at Dean's Auto Recycling to interview Paul

Gleason, "The Most Interesting Man in the World" according to The Day's Mike DiMauro. We were there to learn more about this remarkable man and a job he volunteered to do for Avalonia back in 2013.

Dean's is located on Bloomingdale Road in quiet Quaker Hill near Connecticut College. At first glance, the place looked like any other auto parts and recycling operation. Many junked cars, interspersed with a few very classy ones, were parked around the yard. At the back of the lot, a small building housed a counter, a workshop, and a very small office. We were politely escorted a few steps to the office piled high with car parts. Paul greeted us, offered us chairs, and immediately trained his high-speed fan on us while he endured the heat and mopped his brow.

Business seemed brisk; the phone rang constantly, and Paul's associates ran questions by him throughout the interview. We were impressed by the *esprit de corps* at Dean's. Apparently, everyone loved Paul and vice-versa. Dean's is an extraordinary place; nothing like the dens of villainy and vice we see stereotyped on TV and in the movies.

In 1988, Avalonia was granted a 40-acre property and named it Pequotsepos Brook Preserve. Twenty-five years later, John decided to address a vexing problem on the preserve: a rusty, circa 1941 Plymouth sedan, cleverly nicknamed "Plymouth Rock," dumped near the brook. Despite its appeal as a local attraction, the car raised water pollution concerns.

John contacted Paul in June 2013 to ask if he'd be willing to remove the wreck. To his surprise, Paul immediately replied, "Yes! I love Avalonia....You all do great work!" Accompanied by his then 16-year-old son, Jim, and employee Frank Bodolado, aka "Bottlehead," Paul



Paul inspects some sheet metal.

did the job for free. Avalonia so appreciates Paul's skill and generosity in tackling a difficult challenge. The pictures and captions tell the remarkable story of the car's removal.

Our first question to Paul: Why were so many cars junked on old farmland? Paul explained that farmers routinely buried cars and abandoned other farm machinery on their properties. He'd dug out "old junkers" for people "hundreds of times." As farmers sold their lands to developers or land trusts, demand for removing cars like Plymouth Rock increased. Although today prices

have plunged, at that time selling scrap metal was a profitable business. Paul decided he'd charge to remove cars on land slated for development but do it for free on land to be protected by nonprofits like Avalonia.

Finally, we asked him how he got into the junk yard business. Not by design, he told us. After four years of studying marine science in college and an additional eight working

as a marine science researcher at Woods Hole, Mass., and a few other locations, Paul left the "academy" and fell into the auto recycling business.

Paul's many vocations and avocations go well beyond his work in marine science and auto recycling. He is also an avid fisherman, a three-time champion soccer coach in Old Lyme, and master story-teller. Paul regaled us with story after story. He told us about a grate-



Frank uses a battery-powered hacksaw to cut up the vehicle's frame into manageable pieces.

ful customer trying to mail him, per his request, a 50-pound, intact megalodon shark mouth found embedded in Baja Peninsula coral. Over the course of the interview, this story segued to memories of idyllic summers spent in the '50s and '60s on Brainard (or Huntley) Island, owned by his family, off Giants Neck Beach in East



Lyme. Paul said his teenage fishing, snorkeling, and scuba diving experiences in waters alive with pods of porpoises fostered his love of marine life.

Paul the polymath's next pursuit? He's adding turf to his surf credentials and will enroll in a master gardener program this fall.

Photo at left: SUCCESS! Frank, Jim, and Paul celebrate the removal of the 350-pound engine block. All photos of car removal by B. Sullivan.



Frank shows off a section of the roof, which they used as a sled to transfer the heaviest parts from the wreck site to a steep embankment. At that point, they winched it up the hill to the pick-up truck.

Outstanding Photo by David Young

This issue's outstanding photo was captured by none other than our fearless leader, Dennis Main, President of Avalonia. Dennis is a long time birder who is quick to grab his Nikon Coolpix T900 when an



ornithological opportunity presents. The t900 is a great handheld point and shoot camera for wildlife because of a variety of auto exposure settings and a zoom lens that can zoom to the equivalent of a 2000mm 35mm telephoto! In Dennis' steady hands the fully extended lens captured remarkable detail of these cedar waxwings, displaying every detail of their plumage. The crisscrossed outlines of the foliage and the branch are echoed by the orientation of the two birds producing an eye-catching composition full of lush color. The narrative elements are the crabapple stamens

stripped bare of their petals by the hungry waxwings. Of course, like all wildlife photographers, persistence and countless attempts have rewarded Dennis with a truly outstanding photo.



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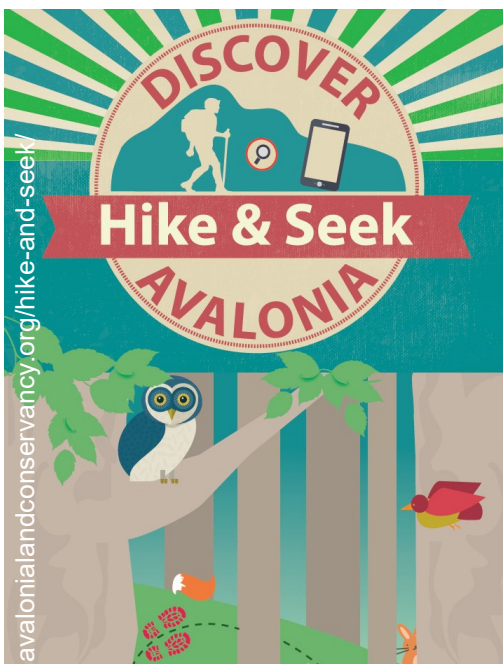
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