



Avalonia Trails

Spring 2019

Over 51 years of preserving natural habitats in southeastern Connecticut by acquiring and protecting lands and by communicating the value of these irreplaceable resources.



Spring Has Sprung at Last!

A Blooming Wetland at Paffard Woods in Stonington



Photo by D. Young

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President's Message

The Spring is Sprung by Anonymous

The spring is sprung, the grass is riz.

I wonder where the boidie is.

They say the boidie's on the wing.

But that's absoid. The wing is on the boid.



Blackburnian warbler photo shot by Dennis Main while birding in Equador

Pardon me as I wax poetic, but I'm inspired by our spring newsletter theme and excited about some great news: Poet, conservationist, and Avalonia BOD member Margaret Gibson was appointed Connecticut's new Poet Laureate on April 3rd. Congratulations, Margaret! (See page 7)

In this time of transition and renewal, Avalonia brings a year-long celebration of its 50th Anniversary to a close with a transition to a dynamic new logo. (See page 3) This is a delightful, highly functional creation by member Jonna Chokas and members of the Communications Committee.

Avalonia's multi-year land conservation initiatives are progressing well. First, the 2000-Acre Campaign — Avalonia's response to Connecticut's goal to conserve 21% of Connecticut's acreage as protected open space by 2023. The State is at about 2/3rds of that goal now. We have closed on about 700 acres with another 1300+ acres in the pipeline thanks largely to the hard work of our volunteers, funds from generous donors, state and other grants, and an economy with advantageous land prices. (One recent acquisition is featured on page 4)

Secondly, Avalonia set up an endowment fund to finance stewardship of all its conserved properties in perpetuity. Initial efforts were inspiring, going from zero to nearly \$250,000 in less than two years. The goal is to grow the endowment fund to \$900,000 by 2023 as we increase our holdings to nearly 6000 acres. The income then generated by the fund would cover the stewardship expenses generated by the additional acres. While this effort has been low-key to date, I fully expect it to ramp up while our acquisitions efforts ebb as contracts close and we begin our reaccreditation activities.

Finally, the BOD has worked hard to identify and stabilize the annual operating budget. At roughly \$100,000 per year, our operations rely on donations, membership dues and various ongoing fund-raising efforts. Little Green Light software has enhanced tracking and reporting membership information and, together with Constant Contact communication software, we have enhanced and streamlined membership communication. Streamlined financial statements provide enhanced reporting, making us a more responsive and financially stable organization. We look forward to a secure and productive next 50 years.

Dennis Main



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 Villagra; Contributors: Janet Andersen, Margaret Gibson, Dennis Main, Beth Sullivan, Sue Sutherland, Chuck Toal, Eugenia Villagra, David Young; Photos: Dennis Main, Beth Sullivan, Sue Sutherland, David Young.

Here's to the Next 50 Years by Beth Sullivan

In late February 2019, Avalonia came to the end of its 50th Anniversary year. It was an exciting, full year. There were celebrations, acquisitions, and new initiatives. In our 50 years Avalonia has evolved into an organization that does more than just protect open space: we engage in environmental advocacy and education, wildlife and watershed protection, community outreach, public recreation, and more. Over this last year we experienced real growth spurts on many fronts.



*Goodbye 50!
Transition logo*

We acquired, or began the process to acquire, hundreds more acres of amazing land. These landscapes are precious, and by protecting them, we are creating greenways and blueways and providing habitat for species that may be threatened if the land were developed. These acres are now available, or will be soon, for all of our members and friends to explore and appreciate. Keep an eye on the website as we introduce each new preserve.

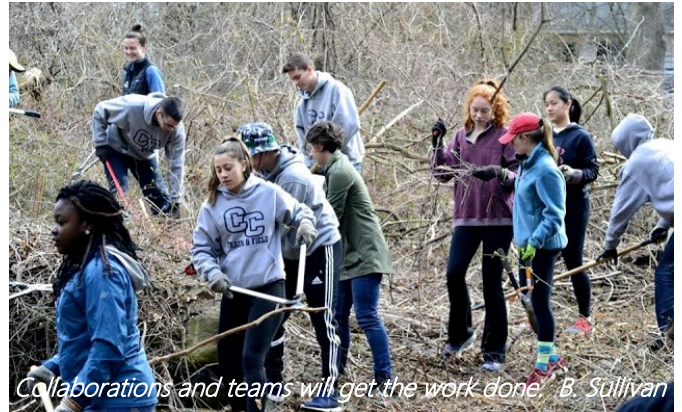


The Ram Point donation started us off in 1968. B. Sullivan

The website itself has leaped into a new phase with additional information and resources, as well as introducing interactive mapping for use on our trailed preserves. With a smart phone and some common sense, you can find your way around even an untrailed property. With the same phone you have access to [Hike & Seek](#). You and your family can get more information before you hike and enhance your experience by looking for, and understanding, some of the natural features along the way.

We have reached out to the greater community to increase awareness of Avalonia's presence and importance in our area. We have seen many more people responding to our call to arms—that is, the helping hands on the ends of the arms for stewardship and volunteering. There are several new teams created to help organize our willing volunteers and direct the energies we need to carry out our mission. The website is also the place to find information about how you can help.

We are collaborating with other organizations and institutions to combine forces and share resources. As an organization, we are involved in trying to understand



Collaborations and teams will get the work done. B. Sullivan

the impact of climate change on our communities as well as on our preserves. We have to think about how best to manage our protected land to withstand the changes that will come over the next years. We get help from academics, scientists, and business experts. We seek funding from individuals, groups, and corporations, as well as grants from institutions and organizations that can help us further our mission.



The next fifty years will bring the challenges of climate change and rising seas. Photo by D. Young

We reach out now in ways we did not even know would exist fifty years ago. Who ever imagined smart phones, the internet, and all the social media opportunities and outlets? We still use paper and stamps to send out a few newsletters, but more and more our communications are done electronically. People get their updates in snippets or flashes of information. Long, newsy reports are a thing of the past.



As all this evolution has taken place, it has prompted the need to change the face of our digital-self. Avalonia has introduced a new logo, a digital-friendly design — one that can be creatively adapted for different purposes; a clean new design, one that evokes the colors of nature, the contours of our landscape and the waterways that we value so highly.

Please check out the story of the process that went into this design [here](#). It is an amazing education itself. We think this newest chapter in Avalonia's remarkable story will help us reach the next generation of members, donors, and volunteers who will continue to support the mission of Avalonia.

New Acquisition: Leo Antonino Preserve

Avalonia is delighted to announce that Mr. Leo Antonino has generously donated a 41.48-acre property located between Interstate 95 and Gold Star Highway on Antonino Road to Avalonia. It will be called the "Leo Antonino Preserve" in honor of Mr. Antonino's tradition of giving back to his community. The land will be conserved in its natural state and open to the public for passive recreation. Workers from the adjacent office park and the many residents who live nearby already enjoy walking the land.



Photo by S. Sutherland

See the floating frog in the vernal pool? Front legs over mouth!

Rocky ridges, streams, vernal pools and shrubby areas make for a wide diversity of habitats for wildlife. The land is home to wood thrush, which require large forest blocks for survival, pileated woodpeckers, and other rare Connecticut species.

Huge boulders known as glacial erratics and old stone walls are other striking features of the property. The land borders open space owned by the Town of Groton, City of Groton, and other contiguous tracts, which combined comprise over 100 acres of unfragmented forest. The less fragmented our forests, the more capable they are of absorbing carbon

and mitigating the effects of climate change. This preserve's forest also helps protect Groton's drinking water. Its streams flow into the Groton Reservoir, less than 1/10th of a mile away.



Photo by S. Sutherland

It is interesting to note that more than a decade earlier this parcel was selected by a developer with plans to build a 200,000-square-foot Wal-Mart Supercenter on the site. Groton's Planning Commission rejected the project on the grounds that the project was too big and too close to the reservoir, prompting a legal battle. Local intervenors in the case argued that polluted runoff from the huge parking lot could end up in Groton's reservoir system. A Superior Court judge ruled in 2007 that the developer did not have "standing" to appeal, and the Commission's decision was upheld.

Avalonia is in the early stages of marking trails that will eventually wind along the property's streams and along features of geological and historical interest like rocky outcrops and stone walls, and up and along the rocky ridges to access beautiful views of the reservoir.

Recently, Avalonia's Trail Maintenance Team leader, Neil Duncan, organized a work party which met at the Antonino Preserve on March 13th. Thirteen volunteers, including Team members and a local Groton



Photo by S. Sutherland

resident, cleared fallen and diseased trees, removed invasive plant species such as bittersweet and winged euonymus, and relocated rocks to "armor" trail paths. They also improved the trail corridor and sight lines for both the short existing trails and a new trail that is being developed

that visits remarkable features on the property such as the vernal pool shown above left. Read more about the Leo Antonino Preserve in *The Day* [here](#).

Volunteers in Focus

StoneRidge Volunteers Help to Conserve Land



It was a cold day last November when Avalonia's director of development and programs, Chuck Toal, arrived at StoneRidge, an assisted living facility in Stonington; a good day to do indoor conservation work. He was welcomed at the entrance by Wendie Colvin, coordinator of in-house and outside events and activities. He and Wendie made their way to a lounge area called PJ's Pub to meet most of the 20+ residents who had signed up to assist Avalonia with a project. This would be the first of many sessions needed to get an important job done.

After greeting the ladies and gentlemen gathered around tables in the pub, Chuck spread out some fruit, cookies, crackers and cheese as he proceeded to explain the task at hand: Over a period of several weeks, they would hand address over 2,000 envelopes; fold the "personalized" letter, stuff the letter as well as a return envelope into the main envelope, and stamp and seal the envelope to be mailed to property owners living adjacent to Avalonia land throughout southeastern Connecticut. Avalonia hoped these "neighbors" would be more likely to respond to the enclosed membership/fundraiser appeal letter than a less-focused mailing to the broader public. Data also shows that hand addressing envelopes, rather than using computer-generated printing, increases the likelihood that the letter would be opened.

The volunteers were raring to go. Chuck and Wendie passed out the materials. Some volunteers, especially the newer residents, came to the event to meet people. These volunteers preferred to work alongside others in a production line. Others preferred to do each step of the process themselves, within a group. In four hours, the job was beautifully done.

Everyone had a good time. Residents who stopped by the pub for a cup of coffee ended up stuffing envelopes because it looked like fun. No need to worry about getting dressed to go out; Avalonia came to them. Some were disappointed when, thanks to their

diligence, they finished ahead of schedule, cancelling a third volunteer day. All 2000 letters were in the mail before the end of February.

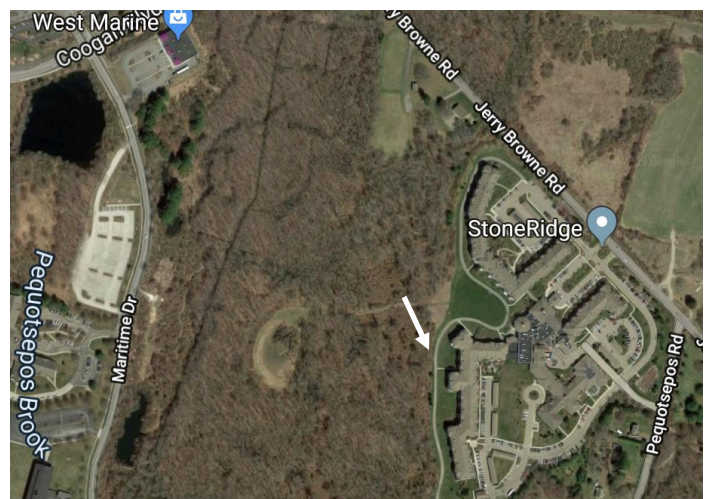
Chuck, impressed with the generosity of these volunteers, was curious to learn more about them. They had given at least 250 hours, saved Avalonia hundreds of dollars in expenses, and made our appeal more appealing with their personal touch. He asked Wendie to tell him more about the volunteers.

Wendie told Chuck how amazed she is when she hears about the residents' lives before moving to StoneRidge. Many had actively participated in non-profit organizations; one had given 40 years to the Red Cross. Why should this passion for a cause stop at StoneRidge? They are environmentally aware, having volunteered for conservation groups and participated in, were perhaps even leaders of, the environmental movement in the past. StoneRidge has a strong and vocal conservation committee that brings in guest speakers, hosts trips, and keeps StoneRidge informed on environmental issues.

Volunteers also appreciate that StoneRidge abuts Avalonia land — Pequotsepos Brook Preserve — which surrounds and buffers their home with green and the sights and sounds of nature. They enjoy walking the preserve and taking their visiting families for hikes on the trails, too.

Chuck was thrilled to update the volunteers about the response to their abutter letters at a thank-you reception at the end of March: 52 new members generating almost \$7,000 in dues, 21 new volunteers, two new "Life" members, and two new principal land stewards.

StoneRidge volunteers stepped up and made a difference. Chuck and the whole Avalonia community are so grateful to these wonderful volunteers and StoneRidge for welcoming us.



The white arrow points to the path from StoneRidge into Avalonia's Pequotsepos Brook Preserve.

GOOD NEWS! Avalonia's Membership Growing

Avalonia's membership campaign over the past three months produced some great results: hundreds of renewals, 85 new members and more than 50 of those new members about Avalonia land. These excellent results are due to the extraordinary efforts of a team of fifteen StoneRidge residents, who also border Avalonia land, who prepared and hand-addressed over **2,000** appeal envelopes! (See article on page 5)

From that mailing we gained not only new members but also 21 volunteers, two property stewards, and two Life members. Overall, we welcomed 16 new Life members whose contributions totaled \$1,000 or more. Members are the foundation of Avalonia and we value each and every one. Have you joined or renewed?



If you have not had a chance to join us or renew, won't you *please TAKE THE LEAP* to join us *today* at our [website](http://www.avalonialandconservancy.org/membership/) or go to www.avalonialandconservancy.org/membership/ ? If not today, before noon tomorrow?

GROTON CONSERVATION ADVOCATES



SHOUT OUT!

to Avalonia Volunteers

MORE GOOD NEWS! Avalonia volunteers are stepping to fill "[Open Positions](#)" posted on our website volunteer page:

Janet Andersen of Groton, a new volunteer, has accepted the Chairmanship of the Groton Town Committee and is successfully building a strong team.

Kimberly Barber-Bradley of Salem has accepted the role of Stewardship Chair and will be working with town committees to prioritize stewardship tasks in eight towns over 4,500 acres.

Bernadette Beene of Groton is helping with data input and cloud file organization. Bernadette recently retired after 42 years with the Antonino Auto dealerships and brings a wealth of administrative skills to Avalonia.

Neil Duncan of Ledyard found his dream job: leading our Trails Team to coordinate dozens of volunteers who make sure our trails are safe and open to the public.

Theresa Eickel of Griswold has joined the Griswold Town Committee.

Len Parker of Stonington has taken on the captain's role for Avalonia's Record Keeping team. A longtime volunteer, Len has been critical in upgrading our paper files and implementing a database that tracks membership, donations and volunteers.

Kathleen Smith of Stonington has taken the lead on expanding our Hike & Seek program. Kathleen recently retired from teaching in East Lyme and is now exploring ways to bring Avalonia's treasure hunt program to elementary schools in nine districts by incorporating the program into the third-grade science curriculum.

These are only a few examples of the many ways in which all of Avalonia's volunteers are making a difference. **More than 120 generous people volunteer on teams, committees and boards.** They logged over 10,000 hours in 2108, but we know that actual volunteer time is more than twice that since not everyone logs their hours.

Thanks to ALL our volunteers!

Riverkeeper by Margaret Gibson



Margaret Gibson, Connecticut's current Poet Laureate, is the author of 12 books of poems, all from LSU Press, most recently **Not Hearing the Wood Thrush**, 2018. A poem from that collection, "Passage," was included in The Best American Poetry, 2017. "Riverkeeper" is part of that collection, too. Avalonia is fortunate that Margaret is serving for a second time on its Board of Directors. Click [here](#) for Day article.

Wanting to be that place where inner
and outer meet, this morning
I'm listening to the river inside,
also to the river out the window,
river of sun and branch shadow, muskrat
and mallard, heron, and the rattled cry
of the kingfisher. Out there is a tree
whose roots the river has washed so often
the tree stretches beyond itself, its spirit
like mine, leaning out over the water, held
only by the poised astonishment

of being here. This morning, listening
to the river inside, I'm sinking into a stillness
where what can't be said stirs beneath
currents of image and memory, below strata
of muons and quarks, now rushes, now hushes
and pools, now casts a net of bright light
so loosely woven there's a constellation
afloat on the surface of the river, so still
I can almost hear it weave in and out —
interstellar, intercellular — and isn't it
truly all one, one world, no *in* or *out*, no *here*
or *there*, seamless, as a lily about to open
from just here into everywhere, is. Just is.
Restful lily. Lucky lily. To bloom must feel
like a river's brightening at daybreak,
or a slow kiss, a throb in the elapse of time,
a shudder of heron shadow flying over
shallows that are merely the apparent
skim of a depth whose bottomless surface
seeps everywhere, bloom and retraction,
an anchored flow that upholds city
and cathedral, bridge and gate,
Orion, odd toad in the Amazon, blue dragonfly,
what it is to love ... Spoil a river, you spoil all this.

Outstanding Photo by David Young



Photo by Beth Sullivan

So, what's so great about this picture? I'll tell you what's so great... the photographer, Beth Sullivan, didn't put the subject in the middle! How many times have YOU put the subject off center to create an interesting composition? Most of the picture is like an abstract expressionist painting...the rotting log, sticks, bark, brown leaves, green leaves and those shadows weaving their way diagonally from right to left. Notice how these elements draw your eye around the picture. The dramatic light also holds your attention. This quiet little undisturbed corner of the woods seems

suddenly stage lit like a scene from an opera as our little hero emerges luminescent from the underworld to sing his aria, even as his cousin lies expiring just above him. It makes you think that everything is going to work out just fine after all.



Avalonia Land Conservancy, Inc.
P.O. Box 49
Old Mystic, CT 06372
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Non-Profit Organization

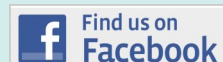
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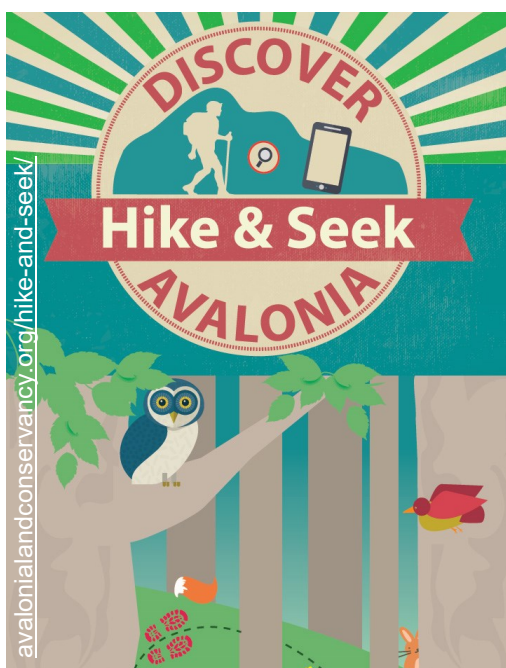
Permit No. 126

Save Some Trees!

We are pleased to share this biannual paper version of our 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/>



Visit Avalonia's website:



Upcoming Avalonia Hikes

Benedict Benson Preserve Hike, April 27, 10:00 am - 12:00 pm
Benedict Benson Preserve, Swantown Hill Rd., N. Stonington + [Google Map](#)

Hike & Seek Babcock Ridge/Henne Preserves, May 18, 10:00 am - 12:00 pm
Babcock Ridge, 113 Babcock Rd., N. Stonington + [Google Map](#)

Celebrate CT Trails Day / Weekend: 5 MORE Avalonia Hikes!

Or go to: avalonialandconservancy.org/event/ct-trails-weekend-5-hikes/

TriTown Forest Preserve – June 1, 9am-12pm

Great Oak Greenway – June 1, 10-11:30am

Hike & Seek on Knox Preserve – June 1, 1-2:30pm

Tefftweald at Bircheturn – June 2, 9-11:30am

Groton Central Greenway – June 2, 1-4pm