



WILDFLOWER HEAVEN AT THE PRESTON NATURE PRESERVE

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY BRUCE FELLMAN

Trying to come up with a best-loved Avalonia refuge is like being asked to determine your dearest child: an impossible, and, no doubt, unwise, endeavor. Still, based on the number of times I've driven up Krug Road to visit the Preston Nature Preserve and used its nearly 56-acre collection of well-managed meadows, wetlands, and woods for an ongoing series of public wildflower walks, PNP is certainly among my favorite places.

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Email avalonialc@yahoo.com
Office Phone (860) 884-3500
Office Hours Tues - Thurs, 10 am - 2 pm

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Avalonia Trails is a biannual publication that communicates Avalonia’s mission to acquire, protect, and maintain land of high conservation and habitat value; combat climate change for the benefit of people and wildlife; and ensure healthy, livable communities for now and generations to come.

Editor Eugenia Villagra

Graphic Design and Layout Sandra Alexander / Dessa Lea Productions

Content Contributors Sandra Alexander, Kimberly Barber Bradley, Terri Eickel, Bruce Fellman, Sharon J. Lynch, Judy Preston, Ian Proctor, Eugenia Villagra

PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

A WORD FROM KIMBERLY BARBER BRADLEY

As the leaves begin to change and crisp temperatures prevail, fall provides perfect opportunities to take in the beauty that surrounds us on the trails of our preserves.

The second annual Great Avalonia Trail Trek took place October 16-24 to raise awareness and gain support from communities, all while having fun and getting outside.

Avalonia continues to strengthen and grow. Over the past several months, our stewardship teams have been hard at work under the guidance of Neil Duncan and Tobias Glaza, our new Stewardship Coordinator. Toby’s addition underlines our strong commitment to the perpetual care of our precious resources, and ensures the future of Avalonia.

Avalonia’s continued partnership with Connecticut Sea Grant and the Northern Institute of Applied Climate Science has provided a high-value research opportunity at Hoffman Evergreen Preserve. Our four-part online speaker series on forest sustainability, *Finding the Right Trees for the Right Time: Connecticut Climate Adaptation Workshop*, presents a unique opportunity for conservation teams throughout CT to consider how to integrate climate adaptation planning into the work of their organizations.

We closed on two new properties, one in North Stonington and one in Norwich, to protect high-value natural resources and watersheds which provide habitat for birds and wildlife, sequester carbon, and provide more access to green space for residents throughout New London County and beyond. For the avid hikers amongst us, Avalonia volunteers aided in the creation of the Avalonia Trail Finder, which makes planning a hike on Avalonia land much easier. The Trail Finder and mapping information connect directly to the statewide Connecticut Trail Finder.

Thanks to each and every one of you for your contributions to Avalonia. We are forever grateful to our members and volunteers for their unwavering dedication.

CONTINUED FROM COVER

The preserve became part of Avalonia’s holdings in 1989, and in any season, the attraction is easy to explain. In winter, there’s no better spot for cross-country skiing and snowshoeing than on its rolling two miles of trails. As spring takes hold, the meadows turn green with common milkweed that PNP stewards have long encouraged to benefit monarch and other butterflies. Come autumn, there’s the heady tang of wild grapes in the air as the Preserve’s hardwood trees put on a splendid show of color.

But from my perspective, PNP is at its best in summer, August in particular. The native wildflowers — bee balm, Joe Pye weed, mountain mint, various goldenrods, a smattering of lady’s tresses orchids, thistles, and a stately grass known as big blue stem — make the meadows dazzle and attract a constantly changing cast of pollinators. The butterfly list is impressive enough, with monarchs; great spangled fritillaries; black, tiger, and spicebush swallowtails; Baltimore checkerspots; and pearl crescents among those working the midsummer blossoms. They’re often joined by a variety of bees and beetles, along with a PNP specialty that I’ll travel great distances to observe and photograph. Every August, two diurnal moth species, the hummingbird and snowberry clearwings, respectively, spend the dog days mimicking “hummers,” complete with a hovering flight powered by the blur of wings moving at 60 beats per second. There are also genuine ruby-throated hummingbirds feeding on the nectar-rich blossoms, and for birders, that’s just the start of what PNP has to offer.

Plan your own journey of discovery, and with any luck, our paths will eventually cross. I’m the naturalist with the Red Sox cap: look for me combing the meadow grasses for widow skimmer dragonflies, the shrubby edges of the fields for a rare mocha emerald odonate, the wetlands and ponds for frogs, and that Chinese chestnut, no doubt planted by the original farmers decades ago, for something truly delicious.

Preston Nature Preserve, Preston

Well-established 2-mile, blue and red trail network with bridges and some low hills.

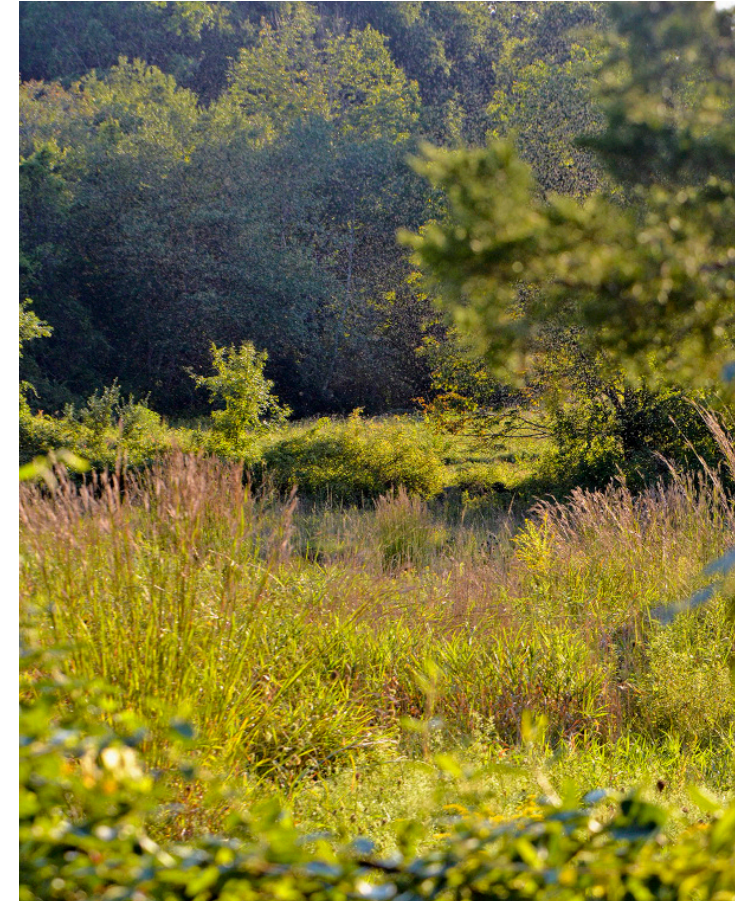
Maintained Uses: walking, hiking

Difficulty: easy to moderate

Surface: grass/meadow and packed earth/dirt

Pets: permitted (dogs on leash)

Tags: forest, meadow, vista, wetlands



Clockwise from top: high summer meadow, bug hunting, widow skimmer dragonfly, mid-winter cross-country skiing. Cover: Monarch butterfly fueling up on Joe Pye weeds before migrating towards Mexico.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

The Land Trust Alliance (LTA) accreditation program recognizes land conservation organizations that meet national quality standards for protecting important natural places and working lands forever. Avalonia is pleased to announce it is applying for renewal of accreditation. A public comment period is now open.

The Land Trust Accreditation Commission, an independent program of the Land Trust Alliance, conducts an extensive review of each applicant's policies and programs. "Avalonia's renewal of LTA accreditation demonstrates our ongoing commitment to perpetual land conservation and stewardship throughout southeastern Connecticut," said Kimberly Bradley, Board President. "Accreditation ensures Avalonia operates according to the best practices within our financial management and governance, while maintaining sound land stewardship practices and our focus on our mission of natural habitat conservation."

The Commission invites public input and accepts signed, written comments on pending applications. Comments must relate to how the Avalonia Land Conservancy complies with national quality standards. These standards address the ethical and technical operation of a land trust. For the full list of standards see www.landtrustaccreditation.org/help-and-resources/indicator-practices.

To learn more or submit a comment online, visit www.landtrustaccreditation.org.

Email your comment to:

info@landtrustaccreditation.org

Fax or mail it to:

The Land Trust Accreditation Commission
Attn: Public Comments
36 Phila Street, Suite 2
Saratoga Springs, NY 12866
Fax: (518) 587-3183

Comments on Avalonia Land Conservancy's application will be most useful by January 1, 2022.



TAG #MyAvalonia to be featured on our Instagram feed!

THE PROBLEM WITH SYNTHETIC TURF



Last summer in the Wirecutter section of The New York Times, while researching synthetic turf, the authors discovered something unexpected: "We went into the research for this article expecting to recommend the best artificial grasses... As our research progressed, however, we realized we had serious reservations — synthetic turf can be a bad value over the long term, there are serious environmental problems to consider, and the costs to install and maintain any sizable, well-done installation proved so high that we concluded we'd be better off investing the money and effort in just about any other form of landscaping."

To read the full article, visit:

[nytimes.com/wirecutter/reviews/best-artificial-grass](https://www.nytimes.com/wirecutter/reviews/best-artificial-grass)



Connecticut Poet Laureate and Avalonia Life Member Margaret Gibson has published a new book of poetry. The Glass Globe blends poems of personal bereavement over the loss of her husband to Alzheimer's disease with elegies for the earth during the ongoing global crisis wrought by climate change. To order a copy, please call (800) 848-6224.

HOFFMAN EVERGREEN PROJECT UPDATE

BY SHARON J. LYNCH

The Hoffman Evergreen Preserve is a site of considerable bustle and activity, thanks to the work initiated by Beth Sullivan's Stonington Town Committee and a collaboration with Juliana Barrett at the University of Connecticut's Sea Grant Program. After 60 acres of ailing trees (due in part to climate change) were given a significant environmental trimming during the winter of 2019, Avalonians planted over 500 trees and shrubs in the cleared and thinned areas. These plants were specially selected to do well over the next 30-50 years, despite climate change. So where, exactly, are we as of fall 2021?

The dogwood, viburnum, sumac, and black gum planted last spring are all doing well, while the persimmons struggle. The red oaks imported from Maryland nurseries are healthy. This is a fascinating aspect of the project because "southern" red oak genes are being added to the Hoffman red oak gene pool. If the red oak saplings succeed and interbreed with our locals, the prognosis for a more resilient population improves as climate change stresses increase.

The success of the spring plantings is likely due to the rainy spring and summer. A future challenge is an explosion of clusters of endemic beech and gray and black birch sprouting everywhere. The regeneration of oak from stumps and acorns is good news, but Avalonia-sponsored work crews will eventually need to trim back some of this growth to allow the newly-imported trees and shrubs to prosper. The goal for Hoffman is a varied, healthy stand of trees — not monocultures — to provide a dynamic and climate-resilient habitat for all Hoffman's inhabitants.

In October 2021, several other new species of trees were introduced to Hoffman including redbud, loblolly pine and Virginia pine. All the species selected are within the northern edge of their mid-Atlantic range but inching their way into Connecticut.

How will these trees and shrubs do at Hoffman over the next 5, 10, or 30 years? How will we know the answers to the questions that this demonstration site poses for climate change and Connecticut forests? Avalonia work crews and researchers will be monitoring the new trees for quite a while, but not forever. Volunteers from Stonington High School will be stepping up to help.



(1) Work crew led by Beth Sullivan who planted the larger saplings in October, 2021 (2) Juliana Barrett examines a loblolly pine sapling (3) Native beech sprouting everywhere due to the 2019 clearcut. They will be trimmed back to make space for a regenerated forest with more variety (4) Juliana Barrett amidst some large pots of healthy redbud

AVALONIA SPECIAL EVENTS

The Great Avalonia Trail Trek 2021

Many thanks to everyone who supported the 2nd Annual Great Avalonia Trail Trek that raised over \$26,000 to support Avalonia's work. Special kudos to our top fundraiser, Elizabeth Sorensen, who raised an astounding \$3,920! Elizabeth is Avalonia's Volunteer Coordinator and her extraordinary commitment to and care for our planet is evident in everything she does.

From Saturday, October 16, through Sunday, October 24, Avalonia trail trekkers got outside to enjoy the quiet beauty that Avalonia lands offer. In addition to trekking on our preserves throughout the week, Trek participants had an opportunity to run the Atkinson 5K Challenge in Ledyard, visit the Hoffman Evergreen Preserve to check out our efforts to create a climate-resilient forest in Stonington, and attend a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Leo Antonino Preserve in Groton.

Our sincere thanks to all who helped make the Great Avalonia Trail Trek a success, especially our major sponsor, Groton Public Utilities, as well as the 85th Day Food Community, the Oyster Club, the Engine Room, Riverhead Building Supply, Hull Forest Products, In Focus Eyecare, and Aquarion Water.

Hoffman Evergreen Preserve Experiment

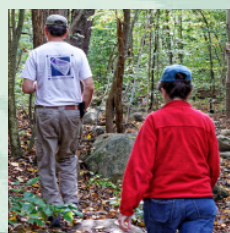
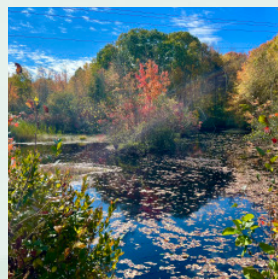
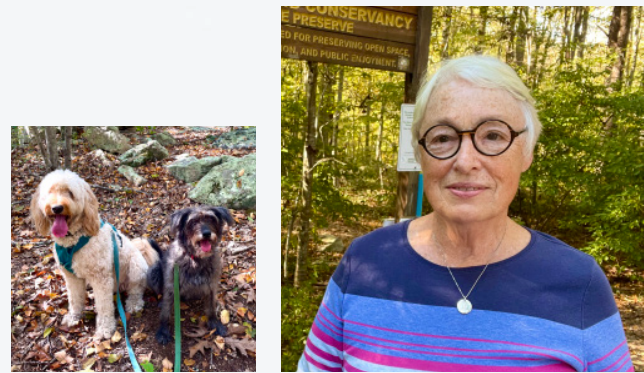
Got trees? Christy Flemming does! She was one of many volunteers who braved the heat, humidity, and bugs to plant hundreds of new trees at Hoffman Evergreen Preserve, part of a research project with CT Sea Grant on how we can create healthier, climate-resilient forests.

Outdoor Afro Kayaking

President Kim Bradley and Director of Development Terri Eickel welcomed Erika Williams, Hike Leader for Outdoor Afro, and her group for two fun kayaking events in Mystic this summer.

Tuesdays with Terri & Toby

Terri Eickel and new Stewardship Coordinator Toby Glaza hit the road in August and September, meeting and greeting people for a series of weekly Tuesdays with Terri & Toby coffee hours at coffee shops across SE CT.



Top-to-bottom: Callie and Zoe do the trail trek, Elizabeth Sorensen, Kevin Halter, Christy Flemming, Pine Swamp Lake, Outdoor Afro, Trail Trekkers, a group gathers for Tuesdays with Terri & Toby

NEW ACQUISITION: CEDAR WOOD PRESERVE

STORY BY IAN PROCTOR

Avalonia officially added another property to their holdings last summer, the Cedar Wood Farm, located on North Wawecus Hill Road in the Town of Norwich. The farm's owner, John Polaski, Jr., a long-time advocate of conservation, preferred not to sell his beloved land to prevent his farm from being turned into a housing development after 40 years of raising horses, cows, goats, and chickens on the land. A state agency suggested he contact Avalonia to discuss his plan to donate the entire farm minus the 5.5 acres containing his house and barn. Avalonia readily and gratefully accepted the terms and closed on the property on June 30th.

The remaining 47.27 acres span beautiful woodlands, fields, old stone walls, ridges, brooks, and seven hills. Avalonia named the property Cedar Wood Preserve to honor the farm and its dense sections of Eastern red cedar found throughout. On the far edge, Route 395 can be heard from a distance, but the roadway is invisible.

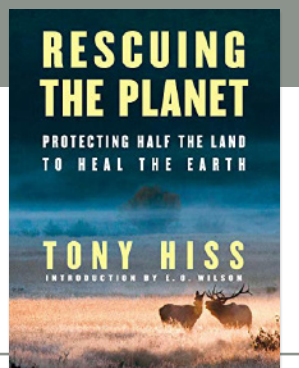
The property hosts a wide range of flora and fauna and has been designated a birding "hotspot" since 46 species have been identified on the property including the great horned owl, pileated woodpecker, and the Eastern wood-pewee, to name a few, and the number is expected to grow.

An ADA-compliant "Accessible Parking" area, a first for Avalonia, is being cleared. Another exciting aspect of Cedar Wood is that, because of its relatively level terrain, at least some of the land may be amenable to the creation of trails that offer a high level of accessibility for many people with various disabilities. Additional steps include surveying, assessing potential critical and sensitive habitats, putting up boundary signs, removing invasives, dead trees and a rusted truck frame, and placing Avalonia's standard Preserve sign on the property. A couple miles of trails are open now and Avalonia looks forward to a ribbon-cutting ceremony once the Preserve sign is ready.

RECOMMENDED READING

Rescuing the Planet: Protecting Half the Land to Heal the Earth by Tony Hiss

From the book jacket: "Rescuing the Planet is an urgent, resounding call to protect 50% of the earth's land by 2050 — thereby saving millions of its species — and a candid assessment of the health of our planet and our role in conserving it." Hiss advocates for large scale conservation, which Bill McKibben said "might give us a fighting chance in the decades ahead."





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AVALONIA *trails*

View our full calendar of events
at www.AVALONIA.org

Avalonia eTrails Blog *by Beth Sullivan*

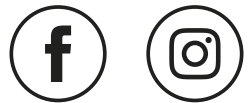
for friends of Avalonia



Since 2013, Beth Sullivan, Avalonia's historian, tour guide, nature enthusiast, and resident blogger, has been studying and documenting life on our preserves. **Avalonia eTrails**, an in-depth digital history of the changing of seasons, of rebirth and discovery, is a must read!

AVALONIAeTrails.blogspot.com

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THANK YOU FOR BEING A VALUABLE MEMBER OF AVALONIA!

Over 53 years of preserving natural habitats in southeastern Connecticut by acquiring and protecting lands and by communicating the value of these irreplaceable resources.

