

The official newsletter of Avalonia Land Conservancy

# AVALONIA *trails*

SPRING  
2022



Photo by Christopher Robin Burger

## **WATER, WATER, EVERYWHERE! DISCOVER AVALONIA AND OUR YEAR-OF-WATER INITIATIVE**

**LET'S CELEBRATE THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CLEAN WATER ACT**

What is your favorite part about being outside? Is it the way buds begin to appear on the trees just when you think winter will last forever, or do you love watching the butterflies and bees flit from flower to flower in the summer? Do babbling brooks and flowing rivers, so full of life, bring you peace? Whatever it is, you will find it at Avalonia.

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 3**

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## AVALONIA LAND CONSERVANCY, INC. BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2022

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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.

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## PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

A WORD FROM DENNIS MAIN

Not long ago we celebrated the 50th Anniversary of Avalonia – now we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Clean Water Act. Each article in this newsletter reflects how clean water is a common theme of our efforts to acquire, steward, and communicate the importance of our conservation lands.

Avalonia’s largest conservation acquisition effort to date is the 669-acre Beckwith Road parcel located primarily within Montville with a sliver of the parcel in Salem. We are currently well into fund-raising with over \$2.5 million secured to date. This parcel accentuates the clean-water focus, with City of New London reservoirs abutting on two sides along 50% of the property boundary. Closing on it will be one of our primary endeavors this year.

A second major project for this year is the merger of Avalonia with the East Lyme Land Trust (ELLT). The ELLT Mission Statement has been “to protect the drinking water” of East Lyme. The ELLT has conserved approximately 500 acres including preserve land on Long Island Sound and they have just completed work on the acquisition of an additional 365 acres of forested property. The merger will result in a stronger, more efficient combined organization.

On our recently acquired 86-acre parcel on the Green Fall River in Laurel Glen, a focused effort will be an accessible trail to the river within a regulated wetland review area, with environmentally sound wetland area trail plans to be approved by the Town of North Stonington officials.

One other highlight is the collective work of our Board of Directors and volunteers on the Land Trust Alliance (LTA) reaccreditation effort. Our application is in for the 5-year review and answers to the LTA Accreditation Commission. Additional Information Request will be submitted by April 26, 2022.

## CONTINUED FROM COVER

We invite you to join our new outdoor events series called [Discover Avalonia](#).

Every month, we’ll host a variety of events on Avalonia preserves throughout southeastern Connecticut. Some of our activities will celebrate and explore water as part of our Year of Water initiative, and others will reveal the beauty of our properties through hikes and educational walks. Whether you love wildflowers, finding salamanders, or expansive views, there will be an event for you!

[Discover Avalonia](#) will also offer stewardship opportunities so that you can get involved and help take care of the land that you love. We always need people to clear harmful invasive plants and plant beneficial native plants, as well as keep our trails clear for everyone to enjoy. Information about our Discover Avalonia series is [on our website](#), so check back often for updates to the calendar! See you on the trails!

BY TERRI EICKEL



## LET’S GO: TOTAL IMMERSION TREKS

BY BRUCE FELLMAN

Anyone who has joined me on the guided nature walks I’ve offered over the years will not be surprised to learn that I’m at least partially amphibious. As a kid growing up in the then-wild sections of the Rhode Island suburbs, I spent an inordinate amount of time in the wetlands, especially in a local brook that, miraculously to a youngster’s way of thinking, changed colors whenever the textile factory upstream altered the dye lots it was allowed to unceremoniously dump in the water.

Thankfully, the Clean Water Act of 1972 made such environmental sacrilege illegal and because of the CWA’s many blessings over the ensuing years, I no longer come home from my wetlands trek with multicolored hands, feet, and clothes. Nor will you, if you come along on a series of explorations in honor of the landmark legislation that celebrates its half-century of environmental benefits this year.

**MARCH 23** We kicked things off with a twilight journey on March 23rd to the vernal pools that grace the interior of Babcock Ridge Preserve in North Stonington. There, we observed a vast array of amphibians and invertebrates that use these magical “part-time puddles” as their trysting grounds and nurseries.

**APRIL 23** On April 23rd, we’ll wade into moving waters, figuratively, if not literally, at the Benedict Benson Preserve in North Stonington to watch its wetlands and its centerpiece stream come to life: a tribute to wise stewardship and the CWA.

**MAY 14** May 14th brings us to the Donald R. Henne Memorial Preserve in North Stonington to search the swamps for its signature birds—great blue herons, tree swallows, and various ducks—that have benefited from the high-quality aquatic habitats the CWA makes possible, along with the area’s premier wetlands engineers, the resurgent beavers that call Henne home.

**JUNE 4** My last guided tour of the spring takes place on June 4th, National Trails Day weekend, at the Tefftweald at Birchturn Nature Preserve where we’ll enjoy the exquisite twists and turns of Wyassup Brook, an artist’s, writer’s, and photographer’s delight.

For more information, including times and directions, and to register for these slow-paced and family-friendly walks, see our website.



(1) Green hellebore  
(2) Leaf stream  
(3) Great blue heron  
(4) Spotted salamander  
(5) Tefftweald at Birchturn



EXCITING NEWS

*Avalonia*  
TO ACQUIRE COPPS BROOK PRESERVE  
IN STONINGTON

BY BETH SULLIVAN

By the time you are reading this, a 224-acre parcel of very significant habitat in Stonington will soon be protected forever as the Copsps Brook Preserve. At the same time, a major source of our local drinking water, Copsps Brook, which flows directly into the Deans Mill Reservoir, will be surrounded and buffered by more unbroken green open space.

All of this was made possible by dedication, team building, and collaboration with the Trust for Public Land. When the property came up for sale, it was immediately recognized as a missing link in a greenway spanning from northern Stonington down to the Denison lands and Coogan Farm. Copsps preserve also comprises an area designated as protective habitat for the New England cottontail and many other species that rely on thickets and wildlife corridors. The Aquarion Water Company pledged to protect the acres bordering their watershed property to the south.

The Town of Stonington pledged to support Avalonia's acquisition of over 100 acres to be opened to the public for passive recreation including hiking, birdwatching, and educational and recreational enjoyment. The US Fish and Wildlife Service pledged financing to acquire the acres that fall within the Great Thicket National Wildlife Refuge boundaries, also open to the public. Recognizing the value of this acquisition, town residents, Avalonia members and friends stepped up to close the funding gap.

The Copsps Brook runs clear and unimpeded and supports populations of native brook trout. While hiking, we spied a wood turtle, an endangered species in Connecticut, resting just below the water's surface. We have already begun to record species of flora and fauna, and this spring and summer we will lay out trails. We have many people to thank for their generosity of time and money in order that this beautiful land be protected for future generations.

## EVERYONE OUT! AVALONIA'S NEW ACCESSIBILITY INITIATIVE

BY ELANAH SHERMAN

Thirty-two years after passage of the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), people with disabilities are still largely excluded from the life-affirming opportunities offered by open space. Lack of access, when access would be feasible and affordable, is not simply a discourteous oversight, but may represent a violation of the ADA and other laws.

Introducing Cedar Wood Preserve, one of Avalonia's newest acquisitions and its first in Norwich! Poised to become the organization's flagship accessible property, the 47-acre parcel will include accessible parking, trails, and features, like bird-watching stations, compatible with passive recreation. An added advantage is that Cedar Wood is in an urban area served by accessible public paratransit. This means people with disabilities lacking their own transportation will be able to enjoy Cedar Wood's meadows, wildflowers, and birds.

Also exciting, the 86-acre Sheets Preserve in North Stonington, another 2021 acquisition, is being evaluated for installation of accessible parking, trail and a fishing dock on the Green Fall River.

Accessibility work at these sites represents the first step of an ongoing initiative that will prominently position accessibility in all project planning, including development of events and communications. A new Accessibility Statement invites people with disabilities to join Avalonia's efforts. Ahead will be an accessible website and the addition of audio description (benefitting people with visual disabilities) and captions to the new video. Collaborations are being sought with disability-oriented



Above: This photo illustrates the level topography at Cedar Wood. A layered combination of materials will be installed to create a flat and more stable surface. Left: Bush-hogging the arterial fire-roads for safety, allowing ready emergency service, maintenance access, and ultimately trail usage.

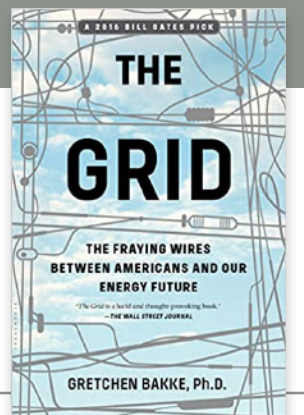
groups. The goal is to ensure maximum access for people with different disabilities to Avalonia's places and programs.

The comprehensiveness of this initiative makes Avalonia a statewide model for the seamless incorporation of disability equity into land trust strategy and acquisition.

Good accessibility initiatives are living things, always evolving in response to the creative contributions of others. To learn more or to participate, please contact Elanah Sherman at [elanahs@gmail.com](mailto:elanahs@gmail.com) or (860) 614-7200.

### RECOMMENDED READING

**The Grid: The Fraying Wires Between Americans and Our Energy Future** by Dr. Gretchen Bakke. The most consequential property of all forms of energy — oil, coal, solar, wind, nuclear — is the production of electricity. Without electricity flowing in and around the wires of our homes, TVs, computers, defense system, and financial system, our way of life would come to a halt. Dr. Bakke tells the fascinating story of the grid's origins from the days of Thomas Edison and Nikola Tesla to the present. This epic narrative is truly electrifying.





## CAN YOU NAME THE AVALONIA PRESERVES IN OUR WATER QUIZ?

- 1 Name at least three Avalonia preserves that border Wyassup Brook as it flows south and east toward the Wood-Pawcatuck watershed, a federally-recognized Wild and Scenic River, and provides clean drinking water to over 65,000 people in the Westerly, Rhode Island, area.
- 2 Name Avalonia's largest tidal marsh that also has osprey nesting platforms.
- 3 How many Avalonia preserves can you count that are affected by tides and assist in protecting our local southeastern Connecticut coastline from climate change?
- 4 Name a preserve that contains significant acreage of endangered Atlantic white cedar trees as well as giant rhododendron.
- 5 Name the Avalonia preserve that contains multiple ponds and swamps that assist in the protection of clean water in a designated Connecticut Level A aquifer that supplies drinking water to over 800 homes and protects the headwaters to two streams that flow into the Thames River watershed.

ANSWERS: 1 Tettweald at Birchenturn, Wyassup Brook, and Bell Cedar Swamp 2 Cottrell Marsh 46+ acres 3 Twenty-two 4 Bell Cedar Swamp 5 Pine Swamp Wildlife Corridor

## A FEW HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2021

### The Great Avalonia Trail Trek

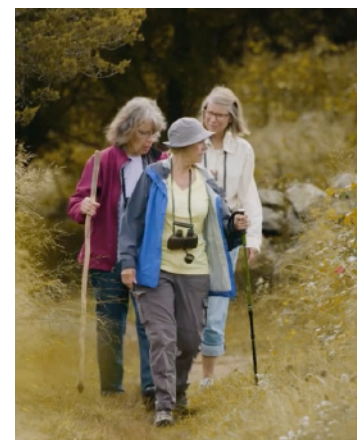
Many thanks to everyone who supported Avalonia in the fall of 2021. We raised almost \$27,000 as people hiked, kayaked, or walked their dogs on Avalonia preserves – all to help conserve and steward land throughout southeastern Connecticut.

### Leo Antonino Preserve

We also had a great time opening the Leo Antonino Preserve in Groton in October. Leo Antonino, who donated the stunning 62-acre property, was on hand to cut the ribbon and Janet Andersen led a beautiful guided hike through the property.

### The Annual Meeting

The 2021 Annual Meeting was held December 2 at the Velvet Mill and featured our new video “Rooted,” and the presentation of our “Nature’s Heros” awards to Mike Goodwin and Pat Turner. It was great to get together again and nosh on pizza and cookies, while celebrating Avalonia’s successes in 2021.



### ENTER THE 2022 AVALONIA PHOTO CONTEST

# WATER EVERYWHERE

Seen any good water lately? Take a picture. Seen any bad water? We'd love to see that too!

Avalonia wants your water pictures, especially from our preserves. Send us examples of how water impacts your world. The good and the bad.

Water is amazing. It takes on many forms from a vernal pool to a raging sea; from an icicle to a foggy mist; from clean drinking water to flooded streets!

2022 is about water for Avalonia. We hope to bring increased awareness to our region's most valuable resource and to demonstrate how we help protect water quality while acting as a filter/buffer when we get overwhelmed with water associated with sea level rise and flooding.

Send us your best pix and we'll recognize three winners: Best Good Water Photo, Best Bad Water Photo and Best Avalonia Water Photo. Upload your photos at [avalonia.org/photo-contest](http://avalonia.org/photo-contest) and you could win a t-shirt, cap, or gift certificate.

Your one picture could speak a thousand words for Avalonia's water awareness in 2022. Thanks for sharing!

### Three Winners:

- ➔ BEST GOOD WATER PHOTO
- ➔ BEST BAD WATER PHOTO
- ➔ BEST AVALONIA WATER PHOTO

## HAPPY 50TH BIRTHDAY CLEAN WATER ACT!

BY CHUCK TOAL & JOELLEN ANDERSON

Prior to 1972, bacteria levels in the Hudson River were 170 times the legal limit, the Cuyahoga River near Cleveland caught fire, pollution in the Chesapeake Bay cost millions in lost revenue every year, and in 1969 pollution from a food processing plant in Florida killed a record 26 million fish. (Source: The History Channel)

The Clean Water Act (CWA) became law on October 18, 1972, after centuries of reckless treatment of American rivers, streams, lakes, and bays. The landmark act sailed through both houses of congress, but was vetoed by President Nixon, who was generally proactive on the environment, over concerns about its high cost. The legislature overruled his veto the next day. (Imagine that now?!)

Because of CWA, Connecticut and Avalonia have benefited greatly by the creation of our state's Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition (OSWA) program, making grants available to organizations and municipalities to preserve land that is "important for enhancing and conserving water quality." Avalonia has received over \$2 million dollars since 2003 to acquire nine preserves protecting more than 1,100 acres, all to support land conservation with a local watershed-based approach. These lands would not have been saved without OSWA and the CWA.

Today, Cleveland's river front is a tourist spot. The processing plant is shut down and, the Chesapeake Bay provides a rich bounty of seafood generating more than \$3 billion in yearly revenue (Chesapeake Bay Foundation). While some environmentalists feel the act did not go far enough to control "non-point source" pollution, (the kind that can't be traced to a single source) and some waterways have not met quality standards, we think the Clean Water Act, though not perfect, is well worth celebrating. Our waterways and communities are a lot better than they were in 1972 thanks to it.



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# AVALONIA *trails*

View our full calendar of events  
at [www.AVALONIA.org](http://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](http://AVALONIAeTrails.blogspot.com)

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**THANK YOU FOR BEING A VALUABLE MEMBER OF AVALONIA!**

Over 54 years of preserving natural habitats in southeastern Connecticut by acquiring and protecting lands and by communicating the value of these irreplaceable resources.

