

The official newsletter of Avalonia Land Conservancy

AVALONIA *trails*

CELEBRATING OCTOBER 18, 2022: CLEAN WATER ACT 50TH ANNIVERSARY

FALL
2022



Photo by Holly Dupuis, Best Good Water Photo Winner in the Water, Water Everywhere Photo Contest

A PARTY FOR ESTUARIES

BY BRUCE FELLMAN

“We told ourselves all water eventually finds the sea,” said poet Katrina Roberts in “Estuary,” the term oceanographers use to describe the land-bounded places where salt and fresh waters intermingle in some of the most biologically productive areas on the planet.

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Avalonia Trails is a biannual publication that communicates Avalonia’s work 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

It has been an exciting year! After a couple years of “lock-downs” and a near standstill on several activities, there is a good deal to report. To illustrate how not every plan has a storybook ending, we terminated three Open Space Watershed Land Acquisition projects that unfortunately did not come together for various reasons. For example, one parcel went through a foreclosure because a California bank was unwilling or able to provide the terms needed to work through the complex acquisition process. On the positive side, none of the three parcels are actively threatened with a more intensive use. Perhaps still potential conservation there?

On a very positive note, we hired an Office Manager, Mary Anne Sherman, and our Stewardship Coordinator, Tobias Glaza, will become full time shortly. We received our Land Trust Alliance national accreditation renewal in August, and we closed on the 224-acre Copsps Brook property in May/June and will close on roughly 800 additional acres in the coming weeks. Finally, Avalonia has adopted an Accessibility Statement and the first fully accessible parking area(s) at some of our preserves should be announced soon.

Two major upcoming initiatives, the acquisition of a 669-acre preserve in Montville/Salem and the merger of East Lyme Land Trust with Avalonia Land Conservancy, Inc., are proceeding judiciously.

The Montville property will be the largest single conservation effort for Avalonia since the 443-acre Browning Conservation Easement in Norwich/Sprague. The East Lyme merger will bring amazing wetlands under Avalonia stewardship.

Rare White Ibis in East Lyme by Dennis Main



CONTINUED FROM COVER

In a flurry of enlightened federal environmental legislation that included the Clean Water and Clean Air Acts, Congress passed the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972 in recognition of the critical importance of estuaries. One key provision of the law established the National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR) System, which now protects more than a million acres of coast in 30 reserves around the country. The newest NERR was established just this year in southeastern Connecticut, and while the 52,000-acre reserve barely includes any of Avalonia’s coastal refuges — the eastern boundary is the Groton/Noank area — we can certainly join the annual celebration of National Estuaries Week, which in 2022 took place from September 17 to 24.

The theme was “Wade In,” and I chose to do that very thing at the Knox Preserve in Stonington. (Most of the Avalonia preserves with estuarine characteristics are found in Stonington and include Sandy Point, Ram Point, Wequetequock Cove, the Knox Family Farm, and Dodge Paddock/Beal, among others.) The Knox refuge is a 17-



acre treasure trove of biodiversity that Avalonia acquired in 1985. It includes coastal upland woods, bird and insect-rich meadows lush with wildflowers — particularly in the autumn — goldenrods, blazing stars, and groundsel trees in full bloom. Pollinators are abundant, and on my celebratory visit, I observed honey

and bumblebees, flower flies, and butterflies, including skippers, American coppers, and monarchs, some of the latter fueling up on seaside goldenrod to power their long-distance migrations south to Mexico. One of the perennial highlights of any trip to Knox is a walk along its coastal section where the Mistuxet Brook flows into a cove known in the native tongue as Quiambaug, “a place to take fish with draw nets.” As I watched, kingfishers, great egrets, and great blue herons attempted to feed their bellies on the food nurtured by the estuary. Seeing such a healthy ecosystem also nurtured my soul. Wade in and join the estuarine celebration!

Pictured above left: Knox Preserve by Bruce Fellman



TAG #MyAvalonia to be featured on our Instagram feed!

A FEW HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2022

Discover Avalonia

Avalonia has held more than a dozen events throughout 2022 as part of our Discover Avalonia Series, including nature walks, stewardship activities, and kayaking trips. Please visit our website Avalonia.org for upcoming opportunities to get outside.

Celebrations

We had a great time opening the Herman E. Sheets Family Forest on June 26, 2022. Paulann Sheets and her family joined us to cut the ribbon and celebrate the preservation of this beautiful forest. We also celebrated the acquisition of the Copsps Brook Preserve this summer – stay tuned for a ribbon cutting in the spring of 2023.

Water, Water Everywhere Photo Contest

We held our first-ever photo contest to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Clean Water Act and we received amazing submissions. Thank you to everyone who sent in pictures – we are already looking forward to next year! Don’t miss the winning images on pages 1 and 6.



EXCITING
NEWS



THE HERMAN E. SHEETS FAMILY FOREST *is now open*

BY TERRI EICKEL

Once you enter the **Herman E. Sheets Family Forest** trail, you are immediately greeted by an old stone foundation left from a house in one of North Stonington's original villages known as Laurel Glen. Throughout the winding trail, remnants of lives lived long ago include foundations, iron decorations, and a cracked piece of pottery. As you hike along the spectacular Green Fall River, you will also see remains of the washed-out mill across the way. And while much of the forest was turned to farmland in the 1700s, it has since grown back. A variety of trees, bushes, and flowers thrive there, including a grove of Connecticut's official flower, the mountain laurel. The trail continues along rolling hills created eons ago by glaciers. Numerous species of wildlife call the Sheets Family Forest home. A beaver lodge can be seen at the base of an old earthen dam and evidence of their fabled industriousness is apparent. Vernal pools fill with frogs and salamanders in the spring and visitors report seeing great blue herons in the marshes.



Please visit the Herman E. Sheets Family Forest on Puttker Road in North Stonington. We have off-street parking and leashed dogs are welcome!

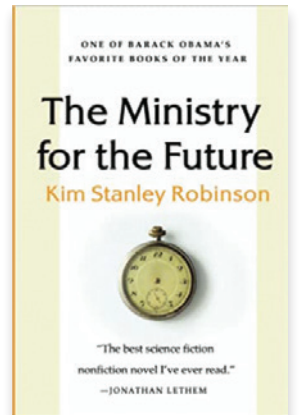
This amazing forest was acquired by Avalonia in June 2021. Volunteers immediately set to work removing invasive plants, building bridges, and blazing the relatively easy 3-mile trail. After months of hard work, Avalonia held a Grand Opening and Ribbon Cutting on June 26, 2022, so the Herman E. Sheets Family Forest is officially open!

What's next for the Sheets Family Forest? Avalonia is working to add an accessible parking space and is assessing the property for installation of a universal access trail. We also have a new intern, graduate student Sandor Bittman, who is creating an educational hike for older elementary school children. Sandor will tell the story of the Sheets Family Forest that will include both scientific and environmental information, as well as American and indigenous history.

RECOMMENDED READING

BOOK: *The Ministry for the Future* by Kim Stanley Robinson. The Ministry for the Future "is a masterpiece of the imagination, using fictional eyewitness accounts to tell the story of how climate change will affect us all. Its setting is not a desolate, post-apocalyptic world, but a future that is almost upon us. Chosen by Barack Obama as one of his favorite books of the year, this extraordinary novel from visionary science fiction writer Kim Stanley Robinson will change the way you think about the climate crisis." Ezra Klein, Vox

ARTICLE: Environmental Research Letters "[The climate mitigation gap: education and government recommendations miss the most effective individual actions](#)" by Seth Wynes and Kimberly A Nicholas The most effective individual actions include: having one fewer child, living car free, avoiding airplane travel, and eating a plant-based diet.



WHITE CEDAR SWAMP PRESERVE RESTORATION

STORY AND PHOTOS BY TOBIAS GLAZA

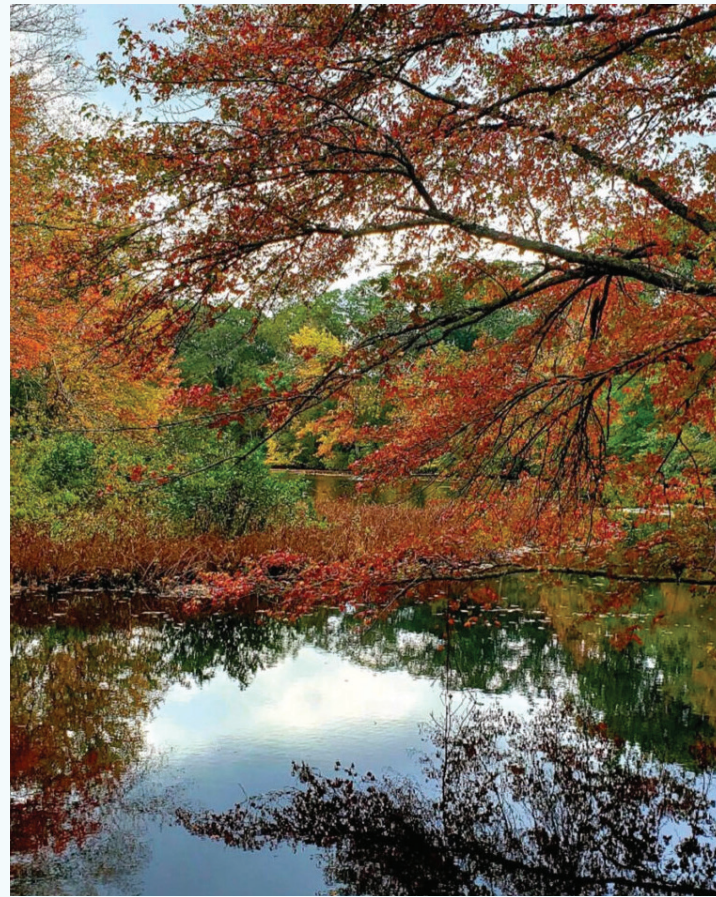
Among the many types of wetlands protected by Avalonia is the unique and imperiled Atlantic white cedar swamp. Few in number, these freshwater forested wetlands serve an outsized role in filtering surface water and providing critical habitat to plants and animals not commonly found elsewhere. While standing water, muck, and the tangle of greenbrier may not seem inviting, recently staff and volunteers have come to appreciate these cedar swamp characteristics.

Since spring, Stonington's White Cedar Swamp Preserve has been the site of a small-scale cedar restoration project partially funded by a grant from the Connecticut Association of Wetland Scientists. This competitive award allowed for the purchase of nearly fifty Atlantic white cedar seedlings. After clearing competing vegetation from a quarter acre of the swamp, the seedlings were planted, protected from deer, and mapped with additional data recorded for future monitoring. Despite the summer's drought, all the seedlings are flourishing, and hopes are high for the success of this restoration effort.





⇒ **BEST BAD WATER**
Hiking in Eastern CT during a drought by Carolyn Baker-Reck



⇒ **BEST AVALONIA WATER**
Henne Preserve by Sherry April

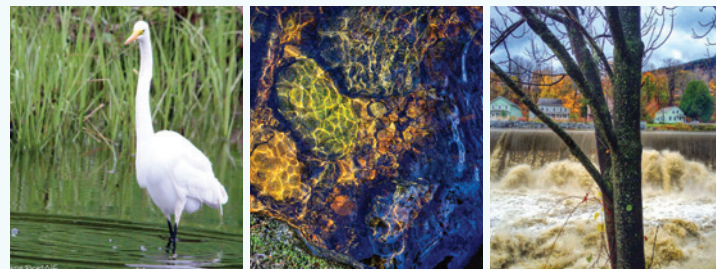
WATER WATER EVERYWHERE

THE 2022 AVALONIA PHOTO CONTEST 📷

We have our winners of the 2022 Water, Water Everywhere Photo Contest. There were three categories. We had so many great entries that we added honorable mentions.



⇒ **BEST GOOD WATER**
Cloud Mirror Image by Holly Dupuis



(1) Best Avalonia Water Honorable Mention *Scenes on Paffard Marsh* by Brenda Rich (2) Best Good Water Honorable Mention *White Cedar Swamp* by Gail Kahover (3) Best Bad Water Honorable Mention *Water Behaving Badly after a storm* by Bryn Nowell

EDUCATION IN THE FIELD AND FOREST

STORY AND PHOTOS BY BETH SULLIVAN

An important part of Avalonia’s mission is to use our preserves to educate visitors, members, students, young and old, and ourselves. Over the last years and many projects, we have had the opportunity to up our educational offerings with group projects, online resources, and internships.

We have worked at Hoffman Preserve for years now, first assessing the problems and looking for answers to help restore a failing forest. Along the way we had college students do research, others do field work, and professors set up informal experimental research areas. Their work guided our decisions about the restoration plan, and it has paid off in that our plantings were made with care and seem to be doing well despite the heat and drought. We produced webinars and workshops to educate a larger audience. Signage was created to inform the public of the process and hoped-for outcomes, and there is a good bank of documentation and data to build upon for decades.

This past June we acquired the Copps Brook Preserve, which protects a variety of habitats and an important water resource. The task of exploring and learning about the preserve was made so much more manageable, and enjoyable for me, by having volunteer summer intern

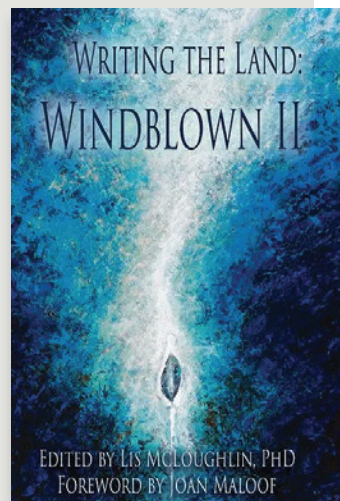


Pictured left and above: Intern Anna Mirsky



Anna Mirsky work with me wandering, photographing and documenting species throughout the preserve. Anna is a Senior at Muhlenberg College in Allentown PA and is majoring in both Environmental Science and Theater. We didn’t have much drama this summer, but we truly got our feet wet in studying the ecology of the new parcel. Using the iNaturalist app, we set up parameters for a project and began data collection. She walked acres of wild land, wetlands, thicket, forest, and brook. She recorded bird songs at dawn and listened for owls at night. She overcame her general dislike of spiders to photograph them. She caught snakes and numerous amphibians and recorded much of the flora of the preserve. Over the summer we truly grew in our knowledge of the preserve, and she had an opportunity to cement her commitment to the environment and education as she moves forward. We can pass the torch to this next great generation.

Writing the Land: Windblown II by Lis McLoughlin (Editor), Martin Bridge (Artist), Joan Maloof (Foreword). This anthology is a collection of poems, photos, and information about land trusts or agricultural trusts. They celebrate the beauty and value of conserved lands of all kinds including forests, islands, prairies, farms, ranches, parks, and waterways. Explore lands you’ve not yet seen, and be inspired. Avalonia member Margaret Gibson wrote poems about Hoffman Evergreen Preserve in Stonington and the Mitchell Preserve in North Stonington. Jose Gonzalez wrote a poem about the Antonino Preserve in Groton.





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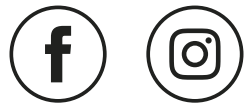
View our full calendar of events
at www.AVALONIA.org

PLEASE
JOIN US
FOR A RIBBON CUTTING
SATURDAY, OCTOBER 22ND AT 10 AM
AT THE ATKINSON PRESERVE

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.

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