FALL
2026

The official newsletter of Avalonia Land Conservancy

AVALONIA trails



STORY AND PHOTOS BY GAIL KAHOVER

AVALONIA'S NEWEST PRESERVE IS ITS LARGEST AND MOST DIVERSE

Avalonia's conservation efforts throughout southeastern Connecticut have expanded with the acquisition of its largest parcel of land to date – the Louis and Gladys Bond Preserve in Montville.

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AVALONIA *trails*

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

A WORD FROM DENNIS MAIN



It's been quite a summer for Avalonia. The merger of the Colchester and Salem land trusts into Avalonia was completed July 1st and as a result, the organization is more streamlined and financially stronger with reduced redundancies.

On July 30th, Avalonia closed on the 670-acre Louis and Gladys Bond Preserve. This brings Avalonia's conserved acres to 8,130, with another 2,000 acres or more of targeted properties in the pipeline for acquisition.

As Avalonia looks forward to managing this ever-increasing conservation portfolio, the Bond property will be an excellent example of being able to do more with less. Efficiencies in maintaining the nice wide "farm roads" will result in more than 5 miles of trails, while reducing maintenance efforts and costs. Portions of the forested areas will be left untrailed, eliminating a maze of footpaths that require intensive volunteer and/or staff labor. Instead, the wide arterial pathways that were pre-existing will provide throughways for safe walking, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing, mountain biking, and equestrian use. We are fortunate to have the Connecticut Horse Council's Volunteer Horse Patrol involved to include Bond in their patrols. Since 2003, the organization has provided 32,779 patrols in 110 lands statewide, including forests, state parks, wildlife management areas, land trusts, and municipal parks.

Avalonia surely looks to fulfill its role as a regional land trust as it continues to preserve land throughout the Southeastern Connecticut Regional Council of Government's 21-town mission area. Property has been recently acquired in Colchester, East Lyme, Lisbon, Salem, and Sprague, and plans are being made for preserves in Franklin, Lebanon, and New London.

The future looks bright! We look forward to continuing our work preserving natural habitats throughout southeastern Connecticut.

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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CONTINUED FROM COVER

In July, Avalonia closed on the 670-acre property for $5.6 million, bringing the total number of acres conserved area-wide to 8,130. The Bond property not only provides recreational opportunities, but protects crucial water sources for the Montville area.

The property is contiguous to two water utility and reservoir properties that are maintained as open space for watershed protection and feed into the New London water system, said Dennis Main, Avalonia's president. "This property has been identified within the Niantic River Watershed Protection Plan as a high-priority conservation and restoration area," Main added.

Eighty-four percent of the Bond property is forested and includes wetlands, meadows, and shrub-land. About 17 acres of the property have been recently used for gravel extraction. Wide gravel roads circle the property, harking back to its farming roots. Ponds dot the landscape, as do large exposed ledges made by previous excavation work.

Avalonia has been actively pursuing the purchase of the Bond property since 2018, garnering financial support through state grants, easements, and donations. In October 2020, Avalonia received $2.3 million from Connecticut's Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition (OSWA) Grant Program for the purchase, and in August, 2025, the Connecticut General Assembly approved $1.4 million in funding. The Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC) provided a LEAP grant in the amount of $500,000. "The OSWA award was the largest made in the history of the program, underscoring the importance of this conservation effort," Main said, adding the State of Connecticut had previously explored conserving the Bond property.

The gravel roads used for farming and excavation work have created approximately 5 miles of trails. Once the trails are improved, Bond can be used for hiking, biking, running, photography, horseback riding, bow hunting, and cross-country skiing. The property also includes a house, which can be used in the future for meetings and classes.

"As the largest Avalonia preserve, it is also the most completely diverse in offering numerous passive recreation possibilities," Main said. Additionally, Main said management of grasslands and scrub vegetation on the property will provide optimal habitat for wildlife.

The purchase of the Bond property comes on the heels of the merger of Avalonia with the Colchester Land Trust and the Salem Land Trust. Like Avalonia, both organizations are nationally accredited by The Land Trust Alliance.







(Top) The remains of a gravel operation (Middle) Gravel roads make great trails (Bottom) A view of the pond that serves as a diverse habitat



CITIZEN SCIENCE AND PHONE APP AIDS IN STEWARDSHIP EFFORTS

BY TOBIAS GLAZA,
DIRECTOR OF STEWARDSHIP

Volunteers use the iNaturalist app on their phones during a Bioblitz event at Dorothy Davis Family Forest Preserve in North Stonington.

Over the last decade Avalonia has grown in size and earned national accreditation. In the last several months alone, between acquisitions and recent mergers, we have added more than 2,000 acres and numerous new habitat types to our stewardship portfolio.

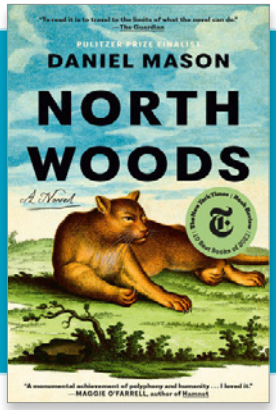
In order to better understand and care for our growing system of preserves and conservation easements, we started the Biodiversity Monitoring Initiative to document and gather data on the flora and fauna that rely on the lands we protect.

In addition to scouring natural diversity database assessments and determinations, mapping critical habitats, digging through our archives, and compiling biotic surveys, some going back 40 years, we have adopted several effective data collection tools. These include passive acoustic monitoring for birds, trail cameras, and traditional field surveys and research by professional botanists and biologists. However, one of the most effective ways of data collection is the use of the iNaturalist mobile app. The app allows users to make observations and identifications using their phones. With more than 7,500 acres of diverse habitat, we recognize that public participation and collaboration, or citizen science, will be key to our efforts and add significantly to our stewardship capacity.

We began in earnest last year, researching iNaturalist and how we might best use their Bioblitz format, an organized public-facing iNaturalist event, to forward our stewardship goals on given preserves. Field testing was promising this summer. We held Bioblitz events at Dorothy Davis Family Forest Preserve, Benedict Benson Preserve, and Glemboski-Ous Preserve. As a result of this work, we have identified and protected areas with sensitive species, evaluated potential trail systems, and, importantly, had the chance to engage with a great set of volunteers!

Thus far, these volunteers, along with staff and members of the general public, have made an astounding 8,410 observations, identifying 1,810 species on Avalonia preserves. This data will be used to inform our management plans, track changes in biodiversity over time, and guide stewardship decisions.

Unsurprisingly, there has been a groundswell of interest in this work, with new volunteers signing up to participate specifically in biodiversity monitoring. If you are interested in learning more about this initiative and upcoming Bioblitz events, please contact us at stewardship@avalonialc.org.



RECOMMENDED READING

***North Woods* by Daniel Mason**

This novel tells the story of a house, its inhabitants (both human and otherwise), and the land around it in Western Massachusetts over the course of three centuries. Its storytelling structure is as inventive as its characters.

AVALONIA'S STAFF IS EXPANDING TO HANDLE GROWTH

By all measures, 2026 was a banner year!

Avalonia now conserves 8,130 acres with another 500 acres likely by year end. The merger with Salem and Colchester land trusts earlier this year netted Avalonia 1,100 acres. The result of the merger is a stronger organization with economies of scale, reductions of redundant expenditures, an enhanced financial footing, and a larger volunteer base.

To help manage Avalonia's growth, Avalonia's board of directors agreed to add one additional land steward to the staff, with another slated to be hired for early 2027. This will bring the total stewardship staff to three, which includes the director, Tobias Glaza, and the land steward, Adam Heckle.

Additionally, an executive director will be hired in the coming months to lead the work as a result of the growth. According to the job description, the executive director will "provide organizational leadership to grow programs across all mission area towns, accomplish strategic priorities and goals, build systems and processes for greater impact and effectiveness, enhance the land trust's internal and external outreach and engagement, and passionately communicate the ALC mission and accomplishments to internal and external stakeholders."

WE'RE HIRING!

Executive Director (Immediate)
Land Steward (2027)

Send a letter of interest and resume to Avalonia, P.O. Box 13, Ledyard, CT 06339 or info@avalonialc.org



LET'S GO: SUPER FALL EVENTS

Save these dates + register at www.Avalonia.org

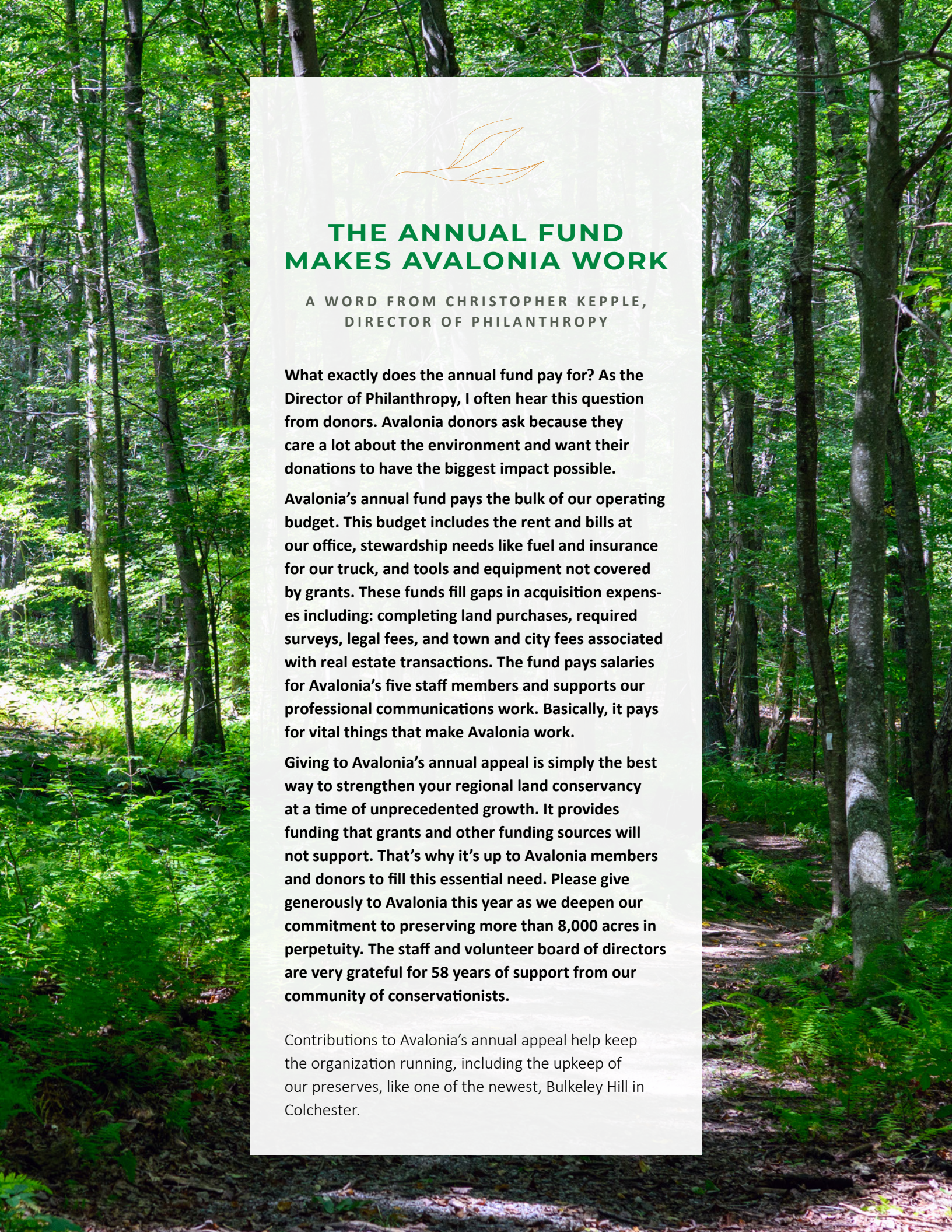


The Louis and Gladys Bond Preserve Grand Opening and Ribbon Cutting, Montville/Oakdale, CT
Thursday, October 22 | 1 pm – 3 pm
Celebrate the conservation of more than 670 acres.

Owls Among Us: An Owl Education Program by Freedom First, The Salem Grange, Salem, CT
Saturday, October 24 | 2 pm - 4 pm
With two live owls, learn about the species, their rehabilitation and habitat needs.

Critter Confidential: Research Conducted on Avalonia Properties, Jonathan Trumbull Library, Lebanon, CT
Saturday, November 7 | 12:30 pm - 2 pm
Researchers from Yale and UConn present on bio-diversity, Great Black-backed gulls and beavers.

Avalonia's Annual Members Meeting
Sunday, December 6 | Location and time, TBD
Connection, insight and updates on the important work happening across our organization.



THE ANNUAL FUND MAKES AVALONIA WORK

A WORD FROM CHRISTOPHER KEPPLE, DIRECTOR OF PHILANTHROPY

What exactly does the annual fund pay for? As the Director of Philanthropy, I often hear this question from donors. Avalonia donors ask because they care a lot about the environment and want their donations to have the biggest impact possible.

Avalonia's annual fund pays the bulk of our operating budget. This budget includes the rent and bills at our office, stewardship needs like fuel and insurance for our truck, and tools and equipment not covered by grants. These funds fill gaps in acquisition expenses including: completing land purchases, required surveys, legal fees, and town and city fees associated with real estate transactions. The fund pays salaries for Avalonia's five staff members and supports our professional communications work. Basically, it pays for vital things that make Avalonia work.

Giving to Avalonia's annual appeal is simply the best way to strengthen your regional land conservancy at a time of unprecedented growth. It provides funding that grants and other funding sources will not support. That's why it's up to Avalonia members and donors to fill this essential need. Please give generously to Avalonia this year as we deepen our commitment to preserving more than 8,000 acres in perpetuity. The staff and volunteer board of directors are very grateful for 58 years of support from our community of conservationists.

Contributions to Avalonia's annual appeal help keep the organization running, including the upkeep of our preserves, like one of the newest, Bulkeley Hill in Colchester.

SPOTLIGHT ON AVALONIA'S NEWEST PRESERVES

INTRODUCING BULKELEY HILL PRESERVE IN COLCHESTER AND WOODLAND WARBLER PRESERVE IN SALEM



Location: Bulkeley Hill Road, approximately 1.5 miles from Route 16/Middletown Avenue, Colchester

History of the preserve: Originally, 15 acres were deeded as open space to the Colchester Land Trust by the developer of a proposed 115-acre subdivision. However, the economy changed, the development boom slowed, and the subdivision was never built. In August 2016, the land trust was able to negotiate a bargain sale for the remaining 115 acres.

What is unique about this preserve? The preserve is a combination of local history, community involvement projects, and natural resources.

Once part of the Bulkeley family farm, the preserve still contains many original stone walls. There are several community-built features including 3 miles of trails and two bog bridges. The outdoor classroom, opened in 2025, is available for groups, schools, and nonprofits to use.

The preserve also has a 23-acre wetland system, pond, and forest that provide important habitat for wildlife.

What do you personally like most about this preserve?
I like how it brings together nature and community.

What activities are available for visitors?

- Geocaching (look for the "Dogs of Bulkeley Hill" series on Geocaching.com)
- Letterboxing around the trails
- A Girl Scout wildlife-finding activity (look for the kiosk before starting your walk)
- A Hike and Seek list you can find at avalonia.org

– Liza Sivek



Location: 340 West Road, Salem

History of the preserve: The preserve consists of four adjacent parcels, all formerly owned by an individual who wanted the properties conserved. Funds to purchase the parcels came from a variety of grants, including the North American Wetlands Conservation Act Grant, the Bafflin Foundation, the Eightmile River Wild & Scenic Watershed Coordinating Committee, and individual donations.

What is unique about this preserve? Although the parcels are connected with old logging roads that are easily traversed, the land is very rugged, containing six ridges with steep slopes, drop-offs and rocky outcrops containing caves. The valleys form deep gorges with streams, woodlands, and vernal pools, providing diverse wildlife habitats.

What do you personally like most about this preserve?
The geology is so unique. The parcels lie north of the Honey Hill fault line between the North American and Avalonian tectonic plates. The resulting ridges thrown up along the fault line run southwest to northeast, while fracture lines through the ridges run north to south. The preserve also lies within a contiguous forest block of more than 1,000 acres and within the 66,000-acre Lyme Forest Block Important Bird Area. The parcels connect to hundreds of acres of land protected by The Nature Conservancy.

What activities are available for visitors? Hiking, wildlife and bird watching are great options.

– Linda Schroeder and David Bingham

Photos by Christopher Kepple

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

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THANK YOU FOR BEING A VALUABLE MEMBER OF AVALONIA!

Over 58 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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