

# Scituate Conservation Commission and Scituate Land Trust 2015 Annual Report

March 2016

*"WORKING TO CONSERVE  
SCITUATE'S NATURAL &  
COMMUNITY RESOURCES"*

The Scituate Conservation Commission and Scituate Land Trust exist to help the community and its citizens sustain their environment and quality of life while meeting their economic needs.

We are non-regulatory, town organizations dedicated to:

- Identifying and conserving Scituate's important natural resources;
- Improving the knowledge base from which land use and natural resource decisions are made;
- Building local capacity to protect and manage natural resources as our town grows;
- Conserving our town's unique community character;
- Continuing the Town's legacy as the steward of the state's primary drinking water supply—the Scituate Reservoir.

For More Information

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Scituate

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[www.scituateriltcc.org](http://www.scituateriltcc.org)

## *Property Management Activities in 2015*

This year, several management activities at Lawton Farm, Westconnaug Meadows, and Tasca Field were supervised by members of the Conservation Commission and/or Land Trust. Property Management Plans are in place or in the process of being developed for each of the three properties. Every effort has been made to ensure that the Town ordinances reflect the requirements of the Management Plans and, where applicable, the terms of the Conservation Easements or deed restrictions created when the properties were obtained.

### *Lawton Farm*

- The fourth annual Lawton Farm bird survey was conducted in May and June by Chelsea Glinka and Rick McKinney of the URI Department of Natural Resources Science. The survey indicated that the bird population has increased significantly in both species richness and abundance since the initial survey was conducted in 2012. The property continues to provide a unique habitat to a variety of bird species and contributes to maintaining regional bird diversity within New England.
- In August, the Northern RI Supporters of Open Space (NRISOS) helped the Scituate Conservation Commission and Land Trust with a very important project – pulling milkweed from the hayfields. While milkweed is typically considered an important conservation plant which provides a key food source for Monarch Butterfly larvae, it is toxic to livestock. The hayfields at Lawton Farm are managed for grassland nesting birds, such as Bobolink and Eastern Meadowlark. In late summer, following the nesting bird mating season, the hay is cut and used by local farmers to feed livestock. Therefore, the milkweed must be removed before the fields are cut. Milkweed and other native plants continue to flourish in the back fields of Lawton Farm for wildlife and habitat. A special thank you to NRISOS for braving the heat and poison ivy to help complete this task! Anyone wishing to support this project in 2016 should contact the Conservation Commission.
- In 2015, the Lawton Farm Invasive Management Plan was prepared for the Conservation Commission by Dave Renzi of Out in Front Horticulture. The plan provides a summary of invasive species currently on site as well as potential remedial actions to reduce and control the spread of invasive species at the property. The Conservation Commission and Land Trust will actively pursue remedial activity in 2016.

### *Westconnaug Meadows*

- In April, the Conservation Commission and Land Trust hosted a tour of the walking trails at Westconnaug Meadows. Members of the Commission provided local families in attendance with a "show and tell" style presentation of native plant, amphibian, and other wildlife species observed on the tour.
- In the October 2014 issue of Rhode Island Monthly, author Jen McCaffery, with contributions from blogger Ernie Germani, included Westconnaug Meadows in her article titled *5 Rhode Island Hikes Off the Beaten Path*. Westconnaug Meadows was subsequently featured in the April 2015 issue of RI Local Magazine.

*"...I may chalk this one up as one of the most peaceful, serene and quiet hikes I've enjoyed yet. About midway into the hike, I found myself in complete silence – other than the sounds of the chirping birds and the breeze blowing through the various types of trees. Without any doubt, I would consider this one of Rhode Island's best kept secrets."*  
– Ernie Germani

### *Tasca Field*

Tasca Field continues to be the place to be for soccer in Scituate! The Scituate Youth Soccer Association (SYSA) continues to be an excellent steward of the property by managing the turf fields with concern for safety, environmental impact, and overall wear and tear. The Tasca Field Management Plan is in its final stages and we hope to have it finalized soon.

### ***Alice M. Howland 2015 Conservation Award***

Chair Thomas Angell presented the 2015 Alice M. Howland Conservation Award to Ms. Shannon Donovan. Ms. Donovan's commitment to education, science, energy and the environment has led to many amazing accomplishments at Scituate High School. Her innovative curriculum has included re-certifying the school's woodland acreage as a tree farm, establishing a plunge pool on Rockland Road to investigate storm water run-off, converting a gas fueled truck to electric, mapping with geographic information systems (GIS), and invasive species studies. Ms. Donovan and her students have consistently been active in the community, working with the Conservation Commission, Land Trust, Town Council, Forest Conservators Organization, Providence Water Supply Board, Northern RI Conservation District, and many others. In 2011, she was named RI Teacher of the Year and received the Amgen Award for excellence in teaching science.

The Alice M. Howland Conservation Award recognizes an individual, group or organization rendering outstanding service, either recently or over a period of years, to natural resource conservation in the Town of Scituate. The award is dedicated in the memory of Alice M. Howland, formerly of Hope, one of Scituate's conservation pioneers. A perpetual tree plaque commemorating all recipients of the Alice Howland Award now hangs in the Town Council Chambers. Each year the new recipient's name is engraved on a metal leaf and added to the tree. Previous recipients include Mr. Alvah Vernava (2003), Mr. Alfred Hawkes (2004), Mr. James Doris (2005), Ms. Diana Reisman (2006), Mr. Chris Modisette (2007), Mr. Paul Dolan (2008), Hope Associates (2009), Mr. Hans Bergey (2010), Mr. Bob Budway (2011), Mr. Ted Richard (2012), Mr. John Gorham (2013), Mr. Jon Vernava (2014), and Ms. Shannon Donovan (2015).



**Thomas Angel presents Shannon Donovan with 2015 Alice M. Howland Award**



**Perpetual tree plaque commemorating Alice M. Howland Award recipients**

### ***Moswansicut Reservoir Phosphorus Monitoring***

In 2015, Northern Rhode Island Conservation District (NRICD) received a grant from the New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission and the Narragansett Bay Estuary Program to help address the issue of phosphorus pollution to Moswansicut Reservoir, a part of the Scituate Reservoir system. Working in partnership with Providence Water and the University of Rhode Island Watershed Watch volunteer monitoring program, NRICD established a team of volunteers to collect monthly water samples from tributaries, or small streams that lead into the Moswansicut Reservoir. The Scituate Conservation Commission was a close supporter of this effort, contributing a member to the project's steering committee and publicizing the volunteer opportunity. In addition, two Commission members volunteered their time to collect water samples.

Samples were collected monthly and transported to the University of Rhode Island to be analyzed for both total phosphorus and dissolved phosphorus. Phosphorus is an essential nutrient that can be found in fertilizer, animal waste, yard waste, and septic system effluent, and can also come from natural sources. When it washes into waterbodies in high concentrations, however, it can cause algae blooms. Algae blooms are quick, rapid algae growths that are bad for both wildlife and drinking water quality in the Moswansicut Reservoir. On waterbodies where recreation is allowed, some algae blooms can pose a human health risk due to toxins released by blue-green algae, or cyanobacteria.

URI Watershed Watch staff has been hard at work analyzing samples during the winter months. So far, samples have been analyzed through September. Initial results indicate that more phosphorus may be entering the reservoir from the northern part of its watershed, which consists primarily of farms, residences, woods, and wetland areas, than the southern part, which is adjacent to Route 6 in Johnston and Scituate, as well as homes and retail businesses. There could be many reasons for this, however. In addition to the human causes listed above, there are natural phosphorus sources such as wetlands adjacent to some of the sampling sites where phosphorus was the highest. Continuing to build the dataset in future years will give NRICD and Providence Water insight into patterns of phosphorus loading to Moswansicut Reservoir and ideas about how to best target their water quality outreach programs moving forward.

## Conservation Commission 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting

The 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting was held at the Chopmist Senior Center on Tuesday, March 10, 2015. This year's presenters were John and Vivian Maxson of Born to be Wild (BTBW) Nature Center. Since opening their doors in 1998, BTBW has been dedicated to the rehabilitation of sick, injured and orphaned wild animals. Their goal in treating these animals is to return them to their natural habitats — giving them a second chance at life. BTBW believes that by understanding the important role each and every member of the ecosystem plays, we can help preserve essential habitats and sustain Rhode Island's precious biodiversity.

BTBW conducted two presentations at the meeting. The first, at 5:00 PM, was geared towards families with their children in attendance, while the second, at 7:00 PM, was geared towards an adult audience. BTBW brought several raptors and owls with them to show to the audience during each presentation. Children and adults alike were able to get an up close view of these birds. John and Vivian provided a general discussion about each species and then discussed the unique circumstances that landed each bird at BTBW. Although their primary purpose is to rehabilitate wildlife for return to their natural habitat, a handful of raptors and owls reside at BTBW to serve as "resident animal ambassadors" and help educate the public on the importance of maintaining habitats for existing wildlife.

## Property Steward Program in 10<sup>th</sup> Year

People willing to function as "Property Stewards" by walking one of the properties once a month and then emailing a paragraph to the Commission regarding the condition of the property, please email Sue Scanlon at: [suescanlon@yahoo.com](mailto:suescanlon@yahoo.com).



John Maxson and one of BTBW's animal ambassadors at the 2015 Annual Meeting



Children hunt for amphibians at the Westconnaug Meadows guided tour



Vivian Maxson and another of BTBW's animal ambassadors at the 2015 Annual Meeting

## Open Space Saves Tax Dollars

(courtesy of Janet Coit, former Director, The Nature Conservancy, and current Director of the RI Department of Environmental Management)

"In Rhode Island communities where this has been carefully studied, for each dollar of tax revenue a new home brings to a town, the cost to the community in schools, police, fire, public works and other services ranges from \$1.05 to \$1.46. Who pays the difference in revenue to expenses? You and I. On the other hand, open space and working lands cost only 31 cents to 46 cents for every dollar of revenue they generate. Do the math—protecting open space and working lands makes solid economic sense for all of us. Once a piece of open space is developed into residential housing, the town is faced with increased costs that outpace the added taxes from the new housing. Farms, forests and other open spaces are good for Rhode Islanders. Rhody Fresh milk, the wine from our East Bay vineyards, fresh fruits and vegetables at the farmers markets, clean water, forest and wood products, or the nursery plants in your yard, all come from our working lands. Currently, 28 of Rhode Island's 36 school districts buy locally raised or grown products. This works perfectly with the state's initiative to make school meals and snacks healthier and more nutritional for our children. Local agriculture is a growing sector of our economy, and conserving these productive lands is good for our food security and our health. Residents understand that the forests, fields, and wetlands that recharge public aquifers and reservoirs are necessary for clean drinking water, and that the state's rivers, marshes and coastal ponds support our fisheries. People know that these lands and waters will not continue to support the state's economy and enhance our quality of life without efforts devoted to protecting them for the future."

**Look Out! Here Comes 2016!**

The Conservation Commission and Land Trust are working to accomplish multiple goals in 2016.

- **Website Development:** The new website, developed by members of the Conservation Commission and Land Trust, has gone live and can be accessed at [www.scituateriltcc.org](http://www.scituateriltcc.org). The intent of the new website is to provide a user friendly forum to share Conservation Commission and Land Trust information with the public. Specific features include our mission statement, meeting schedules, upcoming events, property management plans, publications, affiliations, and member profiles. It is anticipated that new content will be added to the website regularly, so stay tuned!
- **Grant Applications:** The Conservation Commission has applied for several conservation grants. If awarded, the grants will be used to improve the properties managed by the organizations.
- **Invasive Species Management:** The Conservation Commission anticipates that additional steps will be taken in 2016 to manage and control invasive species at Lawton Farm.
- **14<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting:** The Conservation Commission’s Annual Meeting will be held on Tuesday, March 8<sup>th</sup> at the Chopmist Senior Center. The Alice M Howland Award will be awarded to the Gentian Garden Club for their outstanding contributions to the community. There will also be a presentation by a guest speaker. While the presenter cannot be named as of yet, it sure to create quite a “buzz”.
- **Westconnaug Meadows Guided Tour:** On April 9<sup>th</sup>, the Conservation Commission will host a guided tour of the trails at Westconnaug Meadows. Similar to past years, members will discuss native wildlife with participants.
- **Providence Water Supply Board (PWSB) Public Tours:** PWSB regularly sponsors guided tours of Scituate Reservoir watershed areas. Keep an eye on their website for details!
- **Septic System Workshop:** In continued support of the Northern RI Conservation District, members will participate in the March 31<sup>st</sup> Septic System Workshop at the North Scituate Community House. Timothy Cranston, Water Quality Specialist for the Town of North Kingstown, will be on hand to discuss proper septic system care and maintenance. The event is free to the public.
- **Winter Moth Workshop:** The Conservation Commission will partner with the Northern RI Conservation District to host a Winter Moth workshop on April 6<sup>th</sup>. The event is free to the public.

**Scituate Conservation Commission and Scituate Land Trust**

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**“WORKING TO CONSERVE SCITUATE’S NATURAL RESOURCES”**

**Mission Statement**

To promote and develop natural resources, to protect watershed resources, and to preserve natural aesthetic areas within the town.

**Conservation Commission**

- Thomas Angell, Chair
- Cindy Gianfrancesco, Vice-Chair
- Gary DeBlois
- Carlene Newman
- Sue Scanlon
- Thomas Slater
- Ruth Strach
- Marisa Mouradjian, Clerical Assistant

**Land Trust**

- Thomas Angell, Chair
- David Ellingwood, Acting Vice-Chair
- Cindy Gianfrancesco
- Steven Otto
- Walter Powell
- Sue Scanlon
- Ruth Strach
- Marisa Mouradjian, Clerical Assistant

Join us on our outings in 2016!

[www.scituateriltcc.org](http://www.scituateriltcc.org)