

# Scituate Conservation Commission and Scituate Land Trust 2016 Annual Report

March 2017

*"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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## *Major Improvements at Lawton Farm*

As part of the ongoing management of Lawton Farm as a recreation and conservation area, the Scituate Land Trust and Conservation Commission are making major improvements designed to encourage enjoyment of the area as well as preserve the grassland habitat for nesting birds by preventing prohibited uses.

Last fall work was completed on a footbridge over Cranberry Brook and included improvements to the north stream crossing allowing easier access to fields for cutting hay and removing invasive and other woody plants.

Work planned for this spring will move the parking lot nearer to the entrance on Seven Mile Road, fence it off to prevent motorized vehicles from accessing the trails and fields, and include construction of an educational display consolidating signage in an attractive format at the entrance to the property. The display will incorporate tiles with wildlife illustrations created by children in the Hope after school program.

Much of the work is being funded by a Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management grant, and the tile project is made possible by a grant from the Scituate Art Festival.

Watch for a celebration event in 2017 when the work is completed.

## *Bird Survey Points to Success in Managing Hayfields at Lawton Farm*

The fifth annual bird survey at Lawton Farm was conducted in May and June, 2016 and showed a substantial increase in overall bird abundance and species richness when compared to surveys conducted from 2012 to 2015. Particularly encouraging were the eleven sightings of Bobolink near the brook in a field where none had been sighted in previous years. The increased count shows that hayfield management strategies are paying dividends.

The fields are mowed late in the year to provide prime habitat during the spring and summer nesting season. For many years, Alonzo "Lance" Roberts partnered to mow and hay at appropriate times. Due to other commitments, he is unable to continue but helped to secure the services of Jeffrey Cook, a Foster dairy farmer, to continue appropriate management of the hayfields.

Highlights of the bird survey include:

- Sighting of 28 unique bird species across three sites during three survey periods. The five most abundant species were bobolink, American goldfinch, American robin, blue jay, and Eastern towhee.
- The highest recorded species richness (38) since this survey effort began in 2012, three higher than the next highest recorded in 2014. Over the five consecutive years that this series of surveys has been carried out, a total of 61 unique species have been recorded at Lawton Farm.
- Total abundance across all sites in 2016 was 207 individuals, much greater than the next highest total of 133 individuals observed in 2014, and an increase over the average of 111 individuals per year reported over the previous 4 years.
- Twelve shrubland species were observed in surveys this year, and a total of 21 shrubland species have been reported over the five consecutive survey years (2012-2016). These findings suggest that Lawton Farm is providing important habitat for shrubland species.

The survey was conducted for the Scituate Conservation Commission by Clara Cooper-Mullin and Richard McKinney of the Department of Resource Science at the University of Rhode Island.

### ***Alice M. Howland 2016 Conservation Award***

Chair Thomas Angell presented the 2016 Alice M. Howland Conservation Award to the Gentian Garden Club. Ms. Kathy Bessette and Ms. Heidi McCabe accepted the award on behalf of the organization. The Gentian Garden Club has been a leader in conservation and beautification in the Town of Scituate for many, many years. Their members carry out numerous activities throughout the Town for the benefit of Town residents. They established and maintain the Gentian Wildflower Garden and decorate barrels in the Village Green area all year round. They also provide horticulture programs for youth at the Town’s libraries, and more recently, worked with the Town DPW to restore the Veteran’s Memorial, which they continue to enhance and maintain.

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), Ms. Shannon Donovan (2015), and the Gentian Garden Club (2016).



**Thomas Angell presents the Gentian Garden Club with the 2016 Alice M. Howland Award**



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

### ***“Going Batty” at Lawton Farm***

As part of Rhode Island Land Trust Days, the Scituate Land Trust and Conservation Commission hosted a Bat Talk and Walk at Lawton Farm on the evening of Tuesday, August 16, 2016. Dr. Peter August, a University of Rhode Island professor, led a group of about twenty curious adults and children on a walk around the farm at dusk talking about bats and demonstrating his “bat detector.” He explained how the brown bat population has been severely impacted by white nose syndrome, which weakens their immune system and causes mortality of up to 90 percent while the bats winter in caves in northern New England.

Dr. August is a Professor in the URI Department of Natural Resources Science where he teaches classes in geographic information systems and landscape ecology. He has studied bats in New England, the Caribbean, and South America.

### ***Esek Hopkins Trail Improvements***

Eight young people from the Youth Conservation League joined Land Trust and Conservation Commission members on June 11, 2016, to improve trails at the Esek Hopkins recreation area. The trail head is located behind the softball field across from the State Police barracks. New trails were cut to form a scenic loop of more than a mile. Later, on September 21, the Providence Hiking Club led a hike on the new trails.



**Members of the Youth Conservation League clearing trails at Esek Hopkins**

## ***Conservation Commission 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting***

The 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting was held at the Chopmist Senior Center on Tuesday, March 8, 2016. This year's presenter was Gary Casabona, RI NRCS State Biologist. Mr. Casabona provided an in depth explanation of the history of pollinators and their impact on the environment as well as farming. He described the benefits of creating pollinator habitat to support pollinators and encourage wildlife on local land along with best practices for planting pollinator seeds. Attendees were given starter seed packs and garden signs and encouraged to begin planting pollinator friendly species at their homes.



**Gary Casabona presents at the 2016 Annual Meeting**



**Mike Capirchio leads the Westconnaug Meadows Amphibian Walk**

## ***Westconnaug Meadows Amphibian Walk***

What has become an annual event was held on Saturday April 9, 2016, when area residents joined Scituate Conservation Commission and Land Trust members for a walk at Westconnaug Meadows. The walk was led by former Land Trust Vice Chair Michael Capirchio. Along the way he discussed special features of the landscape and explored amphibians that are found in Rhode Island. The 1.25-mile hike included exploration of a special wetland found on the property that is used by various amphibian species. Later in the summer, volunteers created a trail loop to facilitate access to the vernal pool on the property.

## ***Winter Moth Workshop***

A free workshop was held on April 6, 2016 to help local residents learn steps to take to prevent defoliation of backyard trees, woodlots, and orchards due to the winter moth pest. The speaker was Heather Faubert of the URI Extension Service, and the talk was jointly sponsored by the Scituate Conservation Commission and the Northern Rhode Island Conservation District. More than 40 individuals attended the workshop.

## ***Septic System Workshop***

Co-sponsored by the Scituate Conservation Commission and the Northern Rhode Island Conservation District, a workshop on best practices for septic systems was held on March 31, 2016. It was well attended by nearly 60 people.

## ***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."**

### Coming in 2017...

The Conservation Commission and Land Trust are working to accomplish multiple goals in 2017.

- **Website Development:** The new website ([www.scituateriltcc.org](http://www.scituateriltcc.org)), developed by members of the Conservation Commission and Land Trust, went live in 2015. The organizations have continued to improve the site and add new features. Stay posted for new updates in 2017. 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!
- **Site Improvements at Lawton Farm:** The Conservation Commission and Land Trust will utilize funding from RIDEM and Scituate Art Festival grants to improve parking, site access, and signage at Lawton Farm in 2017.
- **Invasive Species Management:** The Conservation Commission anticipates that additional steps will be taken in 2017 to manage and control invasive species at Lawton Farm.
- **15<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting:** The Conservation Commission’s Annual Meeting will be held on Tuesday, March 14<sup>th</sup> at the Chopmist Senior Center. The Alice M Howland Award will be awarded to the Mike Capirchio for his outstanding contributions to the community. The guest speaker will be Dr. Peter August, professor at the University of Rhode Island.
- **Westconnaug Meadows Guided Tour:** In April, 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!

## Scituate Conservation Commission and Scituate Land Trust

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Join us on our outings in 2017!

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

### “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

Rob Bower, Chair  
 Thomas Angell, Vice-Chair  
 Cindy Gianfrancesco  
 Dorinda Browne  
 Steven Otto  
 Sue Scanlon  
 Ruth Strach  
 Marisa Mouradjian, Clerical Assistant