

Scituate Conservation Commission and Scituate Land Trust 2017 Annual Report

March 2018

*"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

Conservation Commission
and Scituate Land Trust

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www.scituateriltcc.org

Dedication of New Entrance and Improvements at Lawton Farm

Scituate Land Trust and Conservation Commission members celebrated major improvements at Lawton Farm with a ribbon cutting ceremony on September 12, 2017. A small group of community members joined in a tour of the property led by the Conservation Commission's Vice-Chair, Cindy Gianfrancesco. The tour led the group along walking paths, over the recently constructed pedestrian bridge and upper stream crossing, and back to the farm's newly renovated entrance and parking area. The improvements were made possible by a major grant from the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM).

It was a beautiful evening as the children crawled onto a large bale of newly cut hay for a picture that appeared in the Valley Breeze. Foster dairy farmer Jeff Cook was recognized for his part in maintaining the grassland habitat for birds through the annual haying operation after the nesting season.

After the hike, Tom Angell welcomed everyone and thanked Brenda Frederickson, who represented the Town Council at the event. Children who created colorful tiles bordering the new educational sign panels cut the ribbon in celebration. The tiles were created in the Hope after school program under the direction of Sue Scanlon with a grant from the Scituate Art Festival.

Rob Bower described the improvements, including new fencing by the local Ventura Fence company in Hope; the signs and display unit by Signarama of North Kingstown; bridge installation and upper stream crossing work by Angell Excavation; and planning and bids by former Town Engineer David Provonsil. Bower also thanked Richard Tucker and his staff in Scituate Public Works for their work in keeping the paths mowed and their commitment to finishing work on the new parking area in 2018.

Stewardship of this beautiful property is ongoing, with the annual bird surveys and plans for additional trail markers and educational signage.



Rob Bower discusses recent improvements at Lawton Farm

Alice M. Howland 2017 Conservation Award

Thomas Angell, presented this year’s Alice M. Howland Conservation Award to Michael Capirchio, a former member of both the Conservation Commission and the Land Trust. Mike worked tirelessly for a number of years coordinating and implementing grants for the restoration of the bird habitat and grasslands at Lawton Farm. It was a pleasure to present the Alice M. Howland Award pen (crafted in Scituate at the Village Woodturning) to Mike for this valuable work, as well as his great spring amphibian walks at Westconnaug Meadows!

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), Gentian Garden Club (2016) and Michael Capirchio (2017).



Thomas Angel presents Mike Capirchio with the 2017 Alice M. Howland Award



Perpetual tree plaque commemorating Alice M. Howland Award recipients



Dr. Peter August presents at the 2017 Annual Meeting

Conservation Commission 15th Annual Meeting

Postponed by the March blizzard, the 15th annual meeting of the Scituate Conservation Commission and Land Trust was held at the Chopmist Center on Tuesday, May 9th. Dr. Peter August, a Professor in the URI Department of Natural Resources Science, discussed *The Natural History of Bats in RI*. He kept an audience of 50+ participants fully engaged as he focused on the little brown bat, a local species which is being decimated by White-Nose Syndrome, a new disease that kills bats while they hibernate.

Preceding Dr. August’s presentation, Chris Modisette, former Land Trust Chair and director with the Natural Resources Conservation Services of the USDA, gave a powerful presentation about the value and tax benefits of conserved land. The presentation illustrated the importance of a hand-in-hand approach to conservation and development rather than an adversarial approach.



Tom Angell and Rob Bower presented with Lawton Farm photo by NRISOS

The Northwestern RI Supporters of Open Space (NRISOS) presented Land Trust Chair, Rob Bower and Vice Chair, Tom Angell with a photo taken at Lawton Farm for the NRISOS 2016 “Celebrating Open Spaces” calendar by Sharon Madison Bastianelli. The Land Trust will have a plaque added to this gift so that it can be displayed in the Town Hall.

Bird Survey Points to Success in Managing Hayfields at Lawton Farm

The sixth annual bird survey at Lawton Farm was conducted in June 2017 and indicated a continued upward trend in species richness and abundance. Particularly encouraging were the sightings of Bobolink near the brook for the second straight year. Prior to 2016, no Bobolink had been sighted in this field. The increased count is a sign that ongoing hayfield management strategies are paying dividends. Jeffrey Cook, a Foster dairy farmer, has continued his partnership with the Conservation Commission, mowing the fields late in the year to provide prime habitat during the spring and summer nesting season.

To identify breeding birds and evaluate habitat preferences of different species, point count surveys were conducted at three sites within Lawton Farm representing shrubland, forest, and field habitats. In general, survey results in 2017 were similar to the previous year's survey results with respect to species richness and overall bird abundance.

Highlights of the 2017 bird survey include:

- Sighting of 40 unique bird species across three sites during three survey periods. The five most abundant species were bobolink, red-winged blackbird, grey catbird, American goldfinch, and barn swallow.
- Over the six consecutive years that this series of surveys has been carried out, a total of 63 unique species have been recorded at Lawton Farm.
- Bobolinks continue to be observed at Lawton Farm in substantial numbers in Field 1 and 2. This year Bobolinks were again observed in Field 3. This occurred for the first time in the 2016 survey. Lawton Farm continues to provide important habitat for this grassland species, a species of conservation concern in Rhode Island.
- Fourteen shrubland species were observed in surveys this year, an increase of two over 2016. A total of 22 unique shrubland species have been reported over the six consecutive survey years (2012-2017). These findings suggest that Lawton Farm continues to provide important habitat for shrubland species.
- Total abundance across all sites in 2017 was 217 individuals, increasing on the total of 207 individuals observed in 2016 and greatly increasing on the next highest total of 133 individuals observed in 2014.

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



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 2018...

The Conservation Commission and Land Trust are working to accomplish multiple goals in 2018.

- Continued Website Development: The new website (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 content. Stay posted for new updates in 2018. The intent of the 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.
- Improvements at Lawton Farm: The Conservation Commission and Land Trust anticipate additional work at the Lawton Farm entrance in 2018, including improvements to the parking area.
- Invasive Species Management: The Conservation Commission will continue to manage and control invasive species at Lawton Farm.
- 16th Annual Meeting: The Conservation Commission’s Annual Meeting will be held on Tuesday, April 10th at the Chopmist Senior Center. The Alice M Howland Award will be awarded to a member of the community for their outstanding contributions to the community. The guest speaker will be Dr. Richard McKinney, USEPA Research Ecologist and Adjunct Associate Professor at the University of Rhode Island.
- 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

Town Hall
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North Scituate, RI 02857
Phone: 401-647-2822



Join us on our outings in 2018!

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
- Rob Bower

Land Trust

- Rob Bower, Chair
- Thomas Angell, Vice-Chair
- Cindy Gianfrancesco
- Dorinda Browne
- Anna Cimini
- Sue Scanlon
- Ruth Strach