

Scituate Conservation Commission and Scituate Land Trust 2020 Annual Report

March 2021

**"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 a non-regulatory, town organization 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
Contact: Scituate

Conservation Commission
and Scituate Land Trust
P.O. Box 328
North Scituate, RI 02857
(401) 647-2822
www.scituateriltcc.org

You can also follow us on
Facebook for events and
Information

Celebrating Land Trust Days

In September and October, the Scituate Land Trust held guided hikes at Westconnaug Meadows, Esek Hopkins Park, and Lawton Farm as part of the RI Land Trust Council's 2020 Land Trust Days event. The hikes were jointly sponsored by the Gentian Garden Club and were very well received by the community with over 100 participants amongst the three days.

During the hikes, Forester Marc Tremblay, who wrote the Esek Hopkins Management Plan, talked about the planned timber salvage sale and the reasons for it, while Land Trust and Conservation Commission board members discussed unique landscape features, wildlife observations, and the important habitat provided at each property. Recent improvements to the entrance at Lawton Farm, made possible through a grant from the Department of Environmental Management, were discussed with attendees. This included the entrance kiosk which provides educational information about the property and features bird illustrations colored on ceramic tiles by children from the Hope after school program. During the hike at Esek Hopkins Park, Certified Forester Marc Tremblay educated attendees on the damage caused by the gypsy moth infestation several years ago. He discussed the need to remove the dead trees to improve hiker safety and the overall health of the forest. Mr. Tremblay is working with the Conservation Commission and Land Trust to address this tree damage at Esek Hopkins in early 2021.

"Land Trust Days are an annual two-month celebration of the wonderful open space lands – green spaces – across Rhode Island that land trusts are protecting. The event celebrates the fun and excitement of discovering new, natural places to love, and makes it clear that land protected by trusts are there for the community, and shared by everyone." – RI Land Trust Council



Marc Tremblay discusses gypsy moth infestation at Esek Hopkins Park



Forester Tremblay describes the pending timber salvage project at Esek Hopkins Park



Hikers make their way through the trails at Esek Hopkins Park



Cynthia Gianfrancesco addresses hikers gathering at Westconnaug Meadows for Land Trust Days walk.

Alice M. Howland 2020 Conservation Award

The Land Trust and Conservation Commission, presented the 2020 Alice M. Howland Conservation Award to Marie Hawkes. Sadly, Mrs. Hawkes passed away in July 2020. She was a 58-year resident of Scituate and taught elementary school in town for over 20 years, focusing much of her curriculum on experiential and environmental education. In 1979, her work as a teacher was recognized by the State of Rhode Island, being named Teacher of the Year. Following her time as an elementary school teacher, she joined the faculty at Rhode Island College where she was a mentor to the next generation of teachers. Mrs. Hawkes was a lifelong believer in environmental education. She published a water conservation curriculum for the Scituate School Department that was later adopted at a statewide level. Outside her role as an educator, Mrs. Hawkes was also a talented artist who painted hundreds of detailed watercolor renderings of Rhode Island mushrooms and wildflowers, many of which are on exhibit at Audobon Society's Rhode Island Headquarters.

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), Mr. Michael Capirchio (2017), Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd Colvin (2018), Ms. Cindy Gianfrancesco (2019), and Marie Hawkes (2020).



Thomas Angell (CC Chair) presents Marie Hawkes with the 2020 Alice M. Howland Award
(Image by Laura Landen)



Perpetual tree plaque commemorating Alice M. Howland Award recipients

Conservation Commission and Land Trust Annual Meeting

Unfortunately, the Conservation Commission and Land Trust Annual Meeting was cancelled in 2020 due to the Coronavirus pandemic. We are optimistic that this great tradition will resume each spring once restrictions associated with the pandemic are lifted.

Lawton Farm Featured on Rhode Island PBS Series, Our Town: Scituate

Land Trust Members Anna Cimini and Cindy Gianfrancesco submitted a story about the Lawton Farm Recreation Area for the Rhode Island PBS documentary series, Our Town: Scituate. The story highlighted Lawton Farm's beautiful walking paths as well as the valuable grassland bird nesting habitat provided by the property. Our Town is a community project wherein neighbors become filmmakers who tell the stories of their town. Our Town: Scituate aired on Wednesday, March 4, 2020.

Information and a video of the episode can be found at <http://www.ripbs.org/our-town/towns/scituate/>. Be sure to check it out!



Lawton Farm Featured on Our Town: Scituate
(Image obtained from ripbs.org)

Bird Survey Indicates Continued Success in Managing Hayfields at Lawton Farm

The ninth annual bird survey at Lawton Farm was conducted in May and June 2020 and indicated a continued upward trend of species richness and abundance. The continuing strong count is a sign that ongoing hayfield management strategies are paying dividends. Jeffrey Cook, a dairy farmer in Foster, RI, 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 locations within Lawton Farm representing shrubland, forest, and field habitats. Results of the 2020 survey indicated an increase to species richness and abundance in comparison to the 2019 survey.

Highlights of the 2020 bird survey include:

- The total number of species observed this year (53) was the highest number since the surveys began in 2012. This year the five most abundant species were Bobolink, Red-winged Blackbird, Tree Swallow, American Robin, and Eastern Towhee.
- Over the nine consecutive years that this series of surveys has been carried out, a total of 66 unique species have been recorded at Lawton Farm.
- Bobolinks continue to be observed at Lawton Farm in substantial numbers in Field 1, but unlike several of the previous years no Bobolinks were observed in Fields 2 or 3. However, Lawton Farm continues to provide important habitat for this grassland species, a species of conservation concern in Rhode Island.
- Total abundance across all sites in 2020 was 533 individuals, a 45% increase over that observed in 2019.
- Sixteen shrubland species were observed in all surveys this year which is similar to the 19 reported in 2019. A total of 24 unique shrubland species have been reported over the past eight years (2012-2020). These findings suggest that Lawton Farm continues to provide important habitat for shrubland species.

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.



Dr. McKinney and Ms. Cooper-Mullin at Lawton Farm Entrance Kiosk



Bobolink
Dolichonyx oryzivorus
(Image obtained from intobirds.org)



Red-winged Blackbird
Agelaius phoeniceus



Eastern Towhee
Pipilo erythrophthalmus
(Image by Bill Thompson)

New Conservation Commission and Land Trust Members

In 2020, the terms of Sue Scanlon (Land Trust) and Laura Landen (Conservation Commission) came to an end with neither seeking reappointment. Multiple candidates were interviewed to fill the vacancies and with Town Council approval, Kimberly Smith and Lauren Avery were appointed to the Conservation Commission and Land Trust, respectively. We'd like to thank Sue and Laura for all their many contributions over the years and wish them well on all future endeavors!

Land and Water Conference at the University of Rhode Island



On Saturday, March 7, 2020, just before pandemic restrictions were announced, six board members attended the annual Land and Water Conference at URI: Brian Venditelli (CC/LT), Rob Bower (LT/CC), Bill Frederickson (CC), Cindy Gianfrancesco (LT/CC), Laura Landen, and Anna Cimini. All enjoyed networking with colleagues and attending meetings and workshops, including a roundtable discussion with other municipal land trust leaders, a session on using aerial imagery and a new mapping toolbox to monitor protected lands, the annual meeting of the RI Land Trust Council, and more.

Left: Anna Cimini and Cindy Gianfrancesco enjoy the 2020 Land and Water Conference at URI.

Coming in 2021...

The Conservation Commission and Land Trust are working to accomplish multiple goals in 2021.

- The 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. Additionally, the Conservation Commission and Land Trust Facebook page went live in 2020 to provide a user-friendly forum for posting notifications of upcoming events and interacting with members of the community. Stay posted for new updates and events in 2021!
- The Conservation Commission and Land Trust will continue implementing recently updated Property Management Plans for Lawton Farm and Esek Hopkins.
- Invasive Species Management: The Conservation Commission will continue to manage and control invasive species at Lawton Farm.
- Esek Hopkins Timber Salvage: The gypsy moth infestation that occurred several years ago caused significant damage to many trees throughout the Esek Hopkins property. In an effort to improve hiker safety and the overall health of the forest, the Conservation Commission is planning a timber harvest project in early 2021. The project will include the removal of standing trees which are either dead or heavily damaged as well as trees which have fallen onto the recreational trails. Trees designated for removal will be marked by Certified Forester Marc Tremblay (see page 1). Successful completion of this project will allow the community to enjoy hiking through a healthy forest for years to come.
- Land Trust Days: The Land Trust anticipates that it will be participating in the RI Land Trust Council's Land Trust Days once again in 2021. Stay tuned for scheduled events in summer and fall of 2021!
- Conservation and Recreation Grants: Plans are underway to seek grant support for improving trails and signage on all our properties!

Scituate Conservation Commission and Scituate Land Trust

Town Hall
P.O. Box 328
North Scituate, RI 02857
Phone: 401-647-2822

“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
Brian Venditelli, Vice-Chair
Rob Bower
Gary DeBlois
William Frederickson
Cindy Gianfrancesco
Kimberly Smith

Land Trust

Rob Bower, Chair
Cindy Gianfrancesco, Vice-Chair
Thomas Angell
Laureen Avery
Anna Cimini
Matthew Sayer
Brian Venditelli

Join us on our outings in 2021!

www.scituateriltcc.org

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