



# Scituate Conservation Commission and Scituate Land Trust 2021 Annual Report

July 2022

**"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](http://www.scituateriltcc.org)

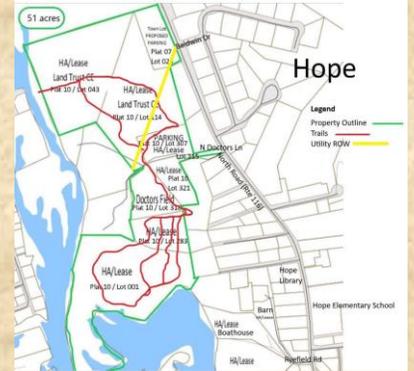
You can also follow us on  
Facebook for events and  
Information

## Major Grants for Trails and Reforestation Received

The Scituate Land Trust and Conservation Commission received word in June 2021 that we were awarded a Department of Environmental Management Recreation Trails Grant in the amount of \$99,533, which will be leveraged with volunteer and in-kind donations from the Town of Scituate into trail improvement projects totaling nearly \$120,000. The award letter said that competition for this grant round was very strong and our project was considered exceptional. It was one of 34 applications requesting over \$2.2 million dollars to support trail-based recreation around the state.

A significant part of the grant is for a new parking lot on Rte. 116 in Hope to access the North Doctors Lane trails near Doctors Field. The Land Trust is partnering with Hope Associates, who have leased their properties to the Town for recreational purposes. Trail improvements as well as directional and educational signage will also be implemented at three other locations: Lawton Farm, Westconnaug Meadows, and Esek Hopkins Park. At press time we were awaiting final contract approvals, but the lengthy process of wetland reviews and approvals have been completed.

In addition, the Land Trust worked throughout 2021 to secure funding to improve Esek Hopkins Park by planting trees, adding a nature trail and informational kiosk as well as ADA accessible trails and a composting restroom. At press time, a re-application process was underway with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for final approval to spend \$290,000 earmarked for the Scituate Land Trust by Senator Jack Reed in the 2022 Consolidated Appropriations Act. More to come in 2022 on these ongoing grant funded projects.



**New parking lot will provide access to a network of trails at North Doctors Lane**



**Tom Angell leads 2021 Annual Meeting walk at the stone quarry in Esek Hopkins Park**



**Cindy Gianfrancesco leads walk at Westconnaug Meadows**



**Scouts (Troop 1, North Scituate) st Lawton Farm workday**



**Kicking off state-wide Land Trust Days at Lawton Farm (Aug. 2021)**

# Alice M. Howland 2021 Conservation Award



Ruth Strach (left), the 2021 Alice M. Howland Award winner, receives a pen (crafted of flame box elder) from Cindy Gianfrancesco (CC member, LT Vice Chair, and 2019 Howland Award winner)

Ruth Strach was the proud recipient of the 2021 Alice M. Howland Conservation Award, presented annually by the Scituate Conservation Commission (SCC) and the Scituate Land Trust (SLT).

Cindy Gianfrancesco, CC member and LT vice chair, presented the award at the July 13 CC/LT annual meeting held at Esek Hopkins Park. In her introduction, Cindy recalled walking into her Conservation Commission interview in 2004 to find, sitting across the table, her high school English teacher and the future Alice M. Howland Conservation Award recipient, Ruth Strach.

Ruth has worked to preserve and conserve open space in Scituate for all to enjoy for nearly two decades. Appointed to the Conservation Commission in 2001 and the Land Trust in 2003, Ruth was the backbone of these committees, serving as vice chair for many years.

According to Gianfrancesco, “working on the CC and LT with Ruth was a learning experience as she challenged each and every one of us to do our best, not by her words but by her actions. Ruth would articulate every issue with clarity and precision, and the English Teacher and librarian in her would shine brightly in her detailed review of documents and draft meeting minutes each month!

“She kept us on our toes, and her energy, foresight and respect for our town’s natural resources influenced and enhanced everything the Conservation Commission and Land Trust did, helping to make Scituate a better place to live for all of us for many years to come.

“Aside from all the hard work Ruth put into the Conservation Commission and Land Trust, she accomplished something I personally am extremely grateful for -- she broke the glass ceiling! Ruth was the first woman to be appointed to the Conservation Commission, to the dismay of several men serving on the Commission at that time, including her now husband, Tom Angell!

“It is truly fitting that Ruth receive this award, as Ruth came up with the idea of the Alice M. Howland conservation award, as well as the idea of an annual meeting, which Ruth had so successfully organized for 17 years. These were two ideas that, again, the men of the Conservation Commission did not initially support, but 17 years later it is obviously a great success and I hope we can continue to organize future annual meetings as well as Ruth did.”

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 Ms. Marie Hawkes (2020).



Perpetual tree plaque commemorating Alice M. Howland Award recipients

## 2021 Annual Meeting Outdoors at Esek Hopkins



Marc Tremblay (right) at 2021 Annual Meeting hike

The 18<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the Scituate Conservation Commission and Land Trust was held outdoors at Esek Hopkins Park on July 13, 2021. Rob Bower welcomed guests and thanked the Town Council and staff for their support. A \$50 thank you gift was made to the Northern Rhode Island Conservation District, represented by Gina DeMarco, for their donation of tree saplings planted at Esek Hopkins Park. A highlight of the meeting was a presentation by Marc Tremblay, the forestry consultant who guided our dead oak salvage project at Esek Hopkins Park in February 2021. Following his remarks, Marc was joined by Foresters Paul Dolan and Chris Modisette to lead a hike around Esek Hopkins park to observe the aftermath of the timber salvage project. All of the annual meeting, including the walk, was live streamed and posted on the Town web site.

## **Bird Survey Indicates Continued Success at Lawton Farm**

The tenth annual bird survey at Lawton Farm was conducted in May and June 2021. Survey results showed an increase in species richness with a total of 49 species observed across the 3 sites. 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, waiting to mow the fields in August or later to provide prime habitat during the spring and summer nesting season. The abundance of moisture in 2021 allowed the farmer to harvest a second cutting in October, which should help to improve the grassland habitat in 2022.

As in past years, 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. While slightly fewer species were observed than the record of 53 in 2020, the results still showed an increase of species richness:

- (1) *This year the most abundant species of the 49 observed were Bobolink, Red-winged Blackbird, Tree Swallow, American Robin, and Eastern Towhee.*
- (2) *Over the 10 consecutive years, a total of 66 unique species have been recorded at Lawton Farm.*
- (3) *Bobolink 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 Bobolinks, a species of conservation concern in Rhode Island.*
- (4) *Total abundance across all sites in 2021 was 442 individuals, a 15% decrease over that observed in 2020.*
- (5) *Seventeen shrubland species were observed during all surveys in 2021, which is similar to the 16 reported in 2020. A total of 24 unique shrubland species have been reported over the past eight survey years (2012-2020).*
- (6) *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.*



**Clara Cooper-Mullin at Lawton Farm entrance, with Dr. Richard McKinney**

Lawton Farm provides unique habitats to a variety of bird species, and thus contributes to maintaining regional bird diversity within New England. From a conservation point of view this is extremely valuable as this area is helping to maintain and enhance local and regional biodiversity. The property is particularly important to shrubland species and grassland species, since both categories of birds have suffered regional declines due to habitat loss and forest succession in recent years.

### **An Outdoor Challenge**

The RIWalks Challenge began in the summer of 2021 – challenging participants to search for the 30 different nature-inspired “creatures” hidden on land trust trails throughout the state!

The Challenge was designed to entice people to get outside and explore land trust trails around the state, the perfect way to reduce stress and anxiety and improve health during the pandemic. From the Sweetgum seed pod to the Chanterelle mushroom, each creature has a QR code to scan with your smart phone so you can track which creatures you have found.

The goal of the Steel Yard artist – Greg Rebis, who designed the creatures - was to “elicit a sense of wonder, surprise, and mystery. The resulting designs are whimsical characters – an anthropomorphization that dances between fantasy and reality – to appeal to the imagination and let people relate to our native flora while out in nature.”

You can still take on the Challenge by visiting [riwalks.org/challenge.php](http://riwalks.org/challenge.php) – to find a list of trails where creatures are hidden. You can also print a checklist of creatures that you can use to track where and when you find them. The Scituate Land Trust partnered with the Rhode Island Land Trust Council on this project, “hiding” creatures on two of our properties.



**Bobolink *Dolichonyx oryzivorus***  
*Image from intobirds.org*



**Rob Bower with “creature”**

### **GIS Mapping Project Helps the Land Trust**

With the support of the Scituate Town Council, in February 2021 the Land Trust entered into an agreement with the Rhode Island Land Trust Council to learn to use Geographic Information System (GIS) tools to map property boundaries and trails in support of the monitoring and maintenance of our conserved properties and trail systems. The project was under the guidance of Eric Wuesthoff (right), land stewardship coordinator for the Council and an Americorps intern. Eric conducted on-site training at Esek Hopkins Park for three board members. The Council furnished GIS devices and access to software enabling real-time tracking for such tasks as locating invasive plants, marking property boundaries, and creating and connecting trails. As a result of the experience, the Land Trust purchased a GIS tracking device allowing continued use of the tools.



### **2021 Conservation Conference Held Virtually**

Six of our ten board members on the Land Trust and Conservation Commission participated in the virtual 2021 Land Conservation Conference. Because of the pandemic, the RI Land Trust Council did not hold its annual summit, instead partnering with the Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition to offer a two-day regional conference in March. The sessions were lively and informative, mostly led by experienced professionals focusing on topics ranging from federal funding opportunities to real estate transactions. While members missed the opportunity to meet face to face with colleagues, networking was still possible through the virtual sessions and on-line chat rooms. Budgeted funds for the CC and LT covered the registration fees.



### **Trail Counter Tracks Trail Use at Westconnaug Meadows**

The Land Trust worked with the Rhode Island Land Trust Council to place a trail counter at Westconnaug Meadows in 2021. It gathered data showing that as many as 20 hikers enjoyed the quiet trail on a single day during the pandemic. While the counter box is located in an inconspicuous place, last winter it was nevertheless discovered and vandalized, but was restored in short order.

### **Wildlife Camera Monitors Wildlife at Esek Hopkins Park**

Thanks to the efforts of board members Bill Frederickson and Matt Sayer, a wildlife camera was installed at Esek Hopkins Park in 2021. Placed off the trail on a red maple tree at the back of the property, it continues to monitor wildlife activities at the park.



### **Mission Statement**

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

### **Scituate Conservation Commission and Scituate Land Trust**

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

Join us on our outings in 2022!

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

*You can also follow us on Facebook for events and information.*

#### **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