Scituate Conservation Commission and Scituate Land Trust 2024 Annual Report

May 2025

"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

Land Trust Makes First Ever Property Acquisition

A small parcel at the end of Riley Lane in Hope (Lot 117 Plat 10) was purchased by the Scituate Land Trust with the closing completed on September 12, 2024. At closing, the parcel was permanently designated as a conservation property held in public trust by the Scituate Land Trust.

The purchase eliminates a 'trail gap' that prevents easy access from Hope Village to nearby trails and usable green spaces along the north branch of the Pawtuxet River. Creating a trail across the parcel will allow Hope Village residents walkable access to the Doctors Lane trails, now called Trott/Perry Preserve. The future trailhead at the end of Riley Lane is a short walk from Hope Elementary School and Hope Library.

The opportunity to acquire this land also serves as a key step in a longer-term hope to establish an uninterrupted riverfront greenway and connect an existing conserved area with the public beach, boathouse, and barn – all landmark recreational facilities in the town of Scituate.

The total purchase price of $119,900 was partially supported by $10,000 provided by the Fields Pond Foundation and a $20,000 award from The Nature Conservancy in addition to a $3,000 award from the RI Land Trust Council. The remaining amount ($86,900) was provided by the Town of Scituate drawn from the town Open Space Reserve fund.

As a municipal land trust, the Scituate Land Trust depends on public support and approval for all actions. A public hearing was held (jointly with the Scituate Town Council) on August 8, 2024 where the Scituate Land Trust requested approval of the purchase and designation of funding from the town's Open Space Reserve. Following discussion, the town council supported the request and approved the amount needed to complete the transaction.

The sale was initiated by the seller, Albert Langlais, whose family was close to Alice M. Howland, who donated much of the conserved property along the river, now owned by Hope Associates and managed for recreation under a lease with the Town of Scituate. Mr. Langlais insisted that the property remain undeveloped, and the Land Trust was able to take advantage of recent Public Trust legislation to protect it in perpetuity.

The Land Trust owns three other properties, Lawton Farm in Hope, Westconnaug Meadows in Clayville, and Smithville Cemetery in North Scituate, all of which were donated by the Town of Scituate. The Riley Lane property is the first outright purchase by the Land Trust.

Town of Scituate Public Notice

The Scituate Land Trust seeks to purchase two parcels in the village of Hope RI pursuant to Town of Scituate Ordinances 10-51 and 10-54: (1) a 0.77 acre parcel identified as Lot 117 on Scituate Tax Assessor's Plat 10 with a purchase price of $119,900; and (2) Lot 272 on Scituate Tax Assessor's Plat 9-1 with a purchase price of $1.00. The Land Trust is requesting up to $100,000 from the Town's reserve funds toward these purchases, and said funds can only be released after a public hearing requiring three weeks of advertising and approval by a majority of the trustees. Notice is hereby given of a public hearing scheduled for 7:00 p.m. on Thursday, August 8, 2024, at the Scituate Senior Center, 1315 Chopmist Hill Road, Scituate, RI 02857.

Alice M. Howland 2024 Conservation Award

At their May 14th 2024 Annual Meeting, the Scituate Conservation Commission (SCC) and the Scituate Land Trust (SLT) recognized Richard Blodgett as this year's recipient of the Alice M. Howland Conservation Award.

Rich Blodgett (center) with Cindy Gianfrncesco (SCC chair) and Rob Bower (SLT chair)

Cindy Gianfrancesco, chair of the SCC, introduced Rich as a friend and partner with the Conservation Commission and the Land Trust for over two decades. As the manager of environmental resources at Providence Water, Rich has spent his career protecting and caring for the Scituate reservoir watershed, comprising more than 12,000 acres of protected land in Scituate. While that vast expanse of open space is closed to the public, Rich has worked with the SCC and the SLT over the years to organize walks to share his vast historical knowledge about Scituate and the reservoir, and to educate the public on the importance of managing the property not only for protecting the water supply serving a majority of the citizens of Rhode Island, but also for promoting wildlife habitat and reforestation so vital to combatting climate change.

Through Rich's stewardship, Providence Water has partnered with the Northern RI Conservation district to support important programs such as the Scituate Reservoir Watershed Education Program, which provides education programs in our elementary and high schools, the Neighbor-to-Neighbor packet sent to all new residents, and well water workshops. Largely through Rich's efforts, Providence Water has bought 90 parcels of land totaling 4,000 acres over the past 35 years. Cindy noted that over the years, Scituate has been fortunate to have talented foresters living or working here (including Paul Dolan, Chris Modisette, and Rich's former boss, Hans Bergey)—all of whom are previous recipients of the Alice M. Howland Conservation Award. It gives us great pleasure to add Rich Blodgett's name to this elite group of foresters who have been so helpful to the Conservation Commission and the Land Trust.

As a thank you for Rich's dedication to conservation, the SCC and SLT presented him a beautifully handcrafted pen made by Village Woodturners in Scituate. The wood is Flame Box Elder and was harvested locally. In addition, Rich Blodgett's name has been engraved on a metal leaf and added to the perpetual tree plaque commemorating all recipients of the Alice M. Howland Conservation Award, which will hang in the Town Council Chambers after current renovations.

Formerly of Hope, Alice M. Howland was one of Scituate's pioneers. An 1896 graduate of Vassar College, Miss Howland (as she preferred to be called) donated her large barn and farm property along Hope Pond on the Pawtuxet River in 1932 to be used by the village as a community and recreation center. Today, Hope Associates carries on her legacy and continues to provide these opportunities to citizens of the town at this location. In 1951 Howland became the first certified Tree Farmer in Scituate. Her family's interest in conservation can be traced back to their interest in forestry and tree planting efforts they undertook on the family farm as early as 1913.

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), Ms. Ruth Strach (2021), Ms. Mary Manning-Morse (2022), and Mr. Tom Angell (2023).

< Perpetual tree plaque commemorating Alice M. Howland Award recipients

Bird Count Declines Slowed at Lawton Farm

New Lawton Farm interpretive sign features endangered birds

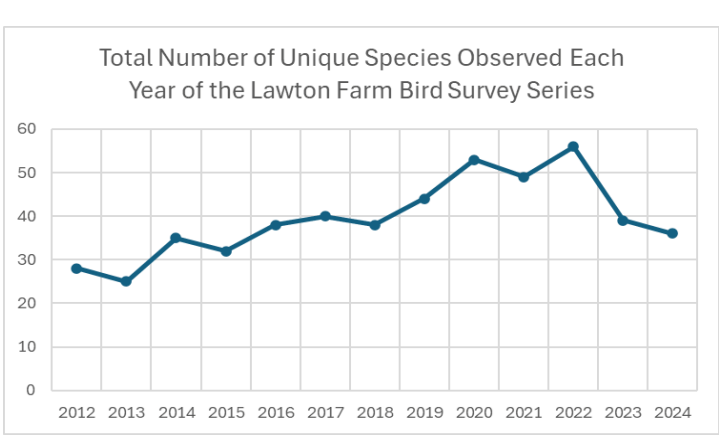
Lincoln Dark conducts the bird counts at Lawton Farm. He is an avid birdwatcher and naturalist in Rhode Island. When he is not out birdwatching, he volunteers for The Audubon Society of Rhode Island as the Coordinator of the RI Osprey Nest Monitoring Program.

The Land Trust has commissioned bird counts at Lawton Farm for thirteen consecutive years. The data from the 2024 survey showed some moderation in the numbers after concerns were raised in 2023 when the report revealed declines in both the number of species and the individuals observed compared to 2022.

The number of unique species observed in 2024 was only slightly less than in 2023. And there was a slight increase in the number of individuals observed at Lawton Farm in 2024 compared to 2023. According to the annual reports, from 2022 to 2023 there was a 73% decrease in the number of individuals observed, and from 2023 to 2024, there was a 3.1% increase in the number of individuals observed. These two consecutive years of significantly lower abundance may suggest that Lawton Farm is experiencing a multi-year "lull" in bird activity. Alternatively, given that the abundances of birds in 2023 and 2024 are much more like those observed from 2012-2018, these data may also suggest that 2019-2022 were years with abnormally high abundances, causing continued concerns about declines. Continued surveying is necessary to confirm either hypothesis, according to Nathan Dark, our surveyor.

The 2024 Breeding Bird Survey Report at Lawton Farm reported on point count surveys conducted at three sites on the farm in May and June of 2024. To identify breeding bird species and evaluate habitat preferences the three sites were chosen to represent shrubland, forest, and field habitats. The results of these surveys showed a decrease of species richness with a total of 36 unique species observed across the three sites. Survey highlights included:

- *The total number of species observed this year (36) was lower than that observed in 2023 (39). This year, the most abundant species were the Bobolink (25), the American Robin (23), the Tree Swallow (17), the Gray Catbird (13), and the Red-winged Blackbird (12).*
- *Over the 13 consecutive years that these surveys have been conducted on the property, 79 unique species have been observed at Lawton Farm.*
- *Bobolink continue to be observed at Lawton Farm in Field 1, and identical to 2023, were seen in Field 3, though only a single individual*
- *Total abundance across all sites in 2024 was 203, a 3.1% increase compared to the results of the 2023 survey series.*
- *Thirteen shrubland species were observed during all surveys in 2023, which is fewer than the eighteen observed in 2022. A total of 20 unique shrubland species have been reported over the past 10 survey years (2012-2022.*



Richard McKinney and Clara Cooper-Mullin conducted the Lawton Farm bird surveys for many years. Clara handed the reins over to Lincoln Dark in 2023. We thank them all for their expert service in compiling the historical bird surveys at Lawton Farm. View all the surveys on our web site at www.scituateriltcc.org.

Work on Recreational Trail Grants in 2024






Mission Statement

To promote and develop natural resources, to protect watershed resources, and to preserve natural aesthetic areas 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 2025!

www.scituateriltcc.org

Contact us at:
scituateriltcc@gmail.com

Conservation Commission

Cindy Gianfrancesco, Chair
Bill Frederickson, Vice-Chair
Rob Bower
Anna Cimini
Gary DeBlois
Katie Schortmann
Greg Thuotte

Land Trust

Rob Bower, Chair
Cindy Gianfrancesco, Vice-Chair
Laureen Avery
Anna Cimini
Bill Frederickson
Chris Mason
Matt Sayer