



BRANFORD LAND TRUST

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PRESIDENT'S LETTER: THE WORK WE DO

One of the things that makes me so happy to work with the BLT is the thoughtfulness and care that goes into what we do. The work of the Buildings Committee this summer gave me yet another example.

As you know, we are rehabbing the Land Trust House to make it structurally sound, energy efficient, and historically accurate. To avoid pollution and public health problems, we are also replacing the outdated cesspool with a modern septic system, thanks to funding from the Community Foundation for Greater New Haven.

The small parcel on which the Land Trust House sits has extensive ledge, so it was necessary to remove several trees to accommodate the tank and leaching field. As a conservation organization, we did not make this decision lightly, and we spent months gathering expert opinions to minimize disturbance.

It is some consolation that BLT protects more than 1,000 acres, including upland forest, so we have saved many, many trees since our founding in 1967. We are grateful for all the benefits these trees have provided over their lives – from shade and wildlife habitat to converting CO2 to oxygen. As one board member said to me, “I view each tree on my own property as an old friend.”

In this spirit, we invited volunteers to gather behind the Land Trust House on a Saturday morning in August to express appreciation for the trees there. Rabbi Rayzl Feuer, a long-time resident of Stony Creek, led the gathering to express appreciation to the trees that were going to be cut. A group of about 20 people, including



BLT officers, board members, and other volunteers, met behind LTH for poetry, prayer, and the opportunity to share our love of trees.

A few weeks later, the company hired by BLT arrived to harvest several trees. Bill Chapin and I were on-site to speak with the workers who expressed sadness about removing the trees but with an understanding that harvesting is sometimes necessary.

Later, a sawyer picked up the felled trees and took them to his sawmill where they were turned into lumber for future use in various BLT projects including benches, signs, and boardwalks. The trees that were too small to be milled were chipped and brought to Jarvis Creek Farm where they are being used as part of an invasive mugwort mitigation project.

We recognize the importance of trees in virtually all cultures, and the many traditional uses for lumber such as boats, shelter, tools, musical

instruments and firewood for heating and cooking. We look forward to seeing the new lumber transformed in similar ways. See the Call for Artists on page 9.

The thoughtfulness and care shown by the Buildings Committee in the rehabilitation of the 19th century Land Trust House, and everyone involved in the consideration of the BLT trees is a testament to the organization's commitment to conservation and preservation. (Photo by Jesse Gordon) ■

Julie Wagner, President

See more on
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BRANFORD LAND TRUST

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The Branford Land Trust NEWS is mailed to all Land Trust members. It is produced by Words by Jen, Branford.

UPCOMING EVENTS

January 2025

TAILS ON TRAILS

Celebrate Walk Your Pet Month with a series of blog posts about enjoying the outdoors with your dogs, chances to share photos, and more! Visit our website or Facebook page to follow along.

JANUARY 1

NEW YEAR'S DAY WALK

WEDNESDAY, 1:00 p.m.

Enjoy walks of varying lengths to discover the vast tracts of open space in the northern part of Branford. Meet at Branford Land Trust DeLeo Preserve, 156 Laurel Hill Road, .9 miles off Brushy Plains Road. No dogs, please.

January 4

THIRD ANNUAL BLT JANUARY FILM SERIES: AFRO-INDIGENOUS RELATIONSHIPS TO LAND

Saturday, 1:00 p.m.

This year, we'll watch the film *Custodians: A Story of Ancient Echoes*, followed by a discussion with Clan Mother Shoran Piper, Tribal Head Leader of the Golden Hill Paugussett tribe and Jesse Rose from the Schaghticoke tribe. At the Blackstone Library.

Ongoing

SATURDAY WORK PARTIES

The Branford Land Trust welcomes local residents to come volunteer for its Saturday Work Parties. This is a great opportunity to meet new people, learn about the Land Trust and local open space properties, and put in some good work on behalf of the community. Upcoming late winter events are listed below. Please email info@branfordlandtrust.org to be included on the Saturday Work Party email list or for questions.



Visit our website for details on all of the events you see listed above.



ROCKLAND POND

A community's effort to preserve a quiet place

The Land Trust recently acquired Rockland Pond, a small seasonal pond on a 0.7-acre parcel in Short Beach previously owned by Yale. Long-time Short Beach residents remember ice skating on the pond, but it had been progressively filled in with Phragmites. In early 2021, a group of Short Beach neighbors, led by Margaret Wheeler, Yin Ho, and Shirley McCarthy convinced Yale to transfer ownership of the property, with the understanding that the property could be restored to a native habitat. The goal would be to eventually donate it to a nonprofit organization to protect it and make it available to the public.

During the past three years, a group of dedicated neighbors too numerous to list here, under the leadership of Yin, Shirley, Clarice Begemann, Jane Bouley, Peg Carpenter, Chris Collins, Carol Phillips, worked with All Habitats Services, Davison Environmental and Ungardening Natives to successfully eliminate the phragmites from the pond, remove the vast majority of invasive plants from the adjoining woods, and replant the area with native shrubs and wildflowers. A bench dedicated to Margaret Wheeler and Greg Carpenter (who was one of the pond restoration's earliest advocates), located a little up the slope from the pond, welcomes the public to sit for a minute and enjoy the quiet of the small woodland. As the new plantings grow, spread and fill in and the pond and wetland change with the seasons, it will bring an ever-evolving beauty to the neighborhood. The Land Trust, working together with the Short Beach Civic Association and the neighborhood Friends of Rockland Pond, will ensure that it remains a quiet public place in a busy neighborhood for future generations. ■



Yin Ho and Henry Hsia donated Rockland Pond to the BLT and this was their party to celebrate it. Along with neighbors, they have spent 3 years and private funds to restore the pond which had been engulfed by invasives. Jamie Cosgrove, Christine Cohen, Robin Comey and Curt Johnson were there, as were members of the Short Beach Civic Association, the BLT, and neighbors. Many had stories about playing in and around the pond as children. The property will be managed by Friends of Rockland Pond and the BLT. (Photos by Julie Wagner)

ESTIMATING CARBON STOCK IN NORTHEAST US SALT MARSHES

Sintra Reves-Sohn, Masters to PhD student, UMass Amherst

Many people know that salt marshes are important coastal ecosystems for providing critical habitat and protecting coastal communities from storms and floods. What some people may not know, however, is that salt marshes also play a crucial role in mitigating atmospheric CO₂. Salt marshes store roughly half of all marine-absorbed carbon, despite only making up 0.2% of the ocean surface! Therefore, a threat to the health of a salt marsh, such as rapid sea level rise, is also a threat to releasing the carbon that a salt marsh stores.

To help understand how much carbon is stored in our Northeast US salt marshes and the potential risks of salt marsh degradation, we are measuring the depth of salt marshes located from Maine to New York City, including BLT's Pawson Park. To conduct the fieldwork, we walk a transect across the salt marsh and measure peat thickness with a 5 m (~15 feet!) metal probe. Results of this study can help coastal land managers make decisions regarding conservation efforts and help more accurately estimate carbon stock in Northeast US salt marshes. ■



Join the BLT and Be Part of the Movement!

From its beginning in an era of unfettered industrial exploitation of natural resources, the American conservation movement has grown and evolved over more than a century and a half. For some it has been about the preservation of the environment simply for the sake of its natural beauty. For others it has been the thrill or the spiritual renewal they experience from spending time in nature. Today, in a rapidly changing world, many people feel an ethical responsibility to preserve open spaces, natural habitats, and environmental resources for the well-being of future generations.

Whatever reasons you may have for joining the Branford Land Trust, you will find the assurance of strength in numbers as you come together with others like you to explore, protect, and learn about our many properties. Join today and take a meaningful step toward achieving your personal goal of preserving our community's natural resources.



Join now or visit
branfordlandtrust.org

MEMBERS-ONLY WALK HIGHLIGHTS COLLABORATION & COOPERATION

To show our appreciation of the support given to us by our members, on a brilliant day in mid-September we held a walk for members only. The site we chose is a secret — hidden behind the New Antioch Church of God (the former St. Elizabeth's Church) and the former site of Connecticut Hospice on Burban Drive — and the theme of the walk was collaboration and cooperation.

To begin the walk, John Herzan and Kyle Driebeek, architectural historians, spoke about the architectural significance of St. Elizabeth Church, and member Margo Henry spoke about training as a young nurse at the adjacent former monastery when it was the first hospice in the US.

After passing tidal wetland preserves belonging to the Land Trust, we walked the Farm River Preserve, a property acquired by the Town with help from the Land Trust, and from there could see the Beacon Hill Preserve, acquired by the State with help from the Town and the Land Trust, thus showing how different entities can work together to preserve natural beauty. Brandon Balzano, a farmer with deep roots in the neighborhood, joined us and spoke about his stewardship of the Farm River Preserve, clearing the neglected hay field of invasive species and now preserving its stunning views of the Farm River salt marshes through yearly haying to feed the family's dairy cattle.

After the walk, at the adjacent Lions Park, we enjoyed tasty refreshments provided by volunteers Marge and Dave Schneider. ■



(Photos by Julie Wagner)

THANK YOU AND WELCOME NEW BOARD MEMBERS

by Joan Merrick, Chair, Nominating Committee

The Branford Land Trust Board of Directors is pleased to announce the election of three officers and six directors to the Board at the Spring Annual Meeting. Newly elected officers serve two-year terms, and Directors, three-year terms.

The membership re-elected Julie Wagner as President, Gordon Hutchinson as Vice-President, and Liz Donegan as Corresponding Secretary. Four Directors re-elected for three-year terms are Jen Broom, Lauren Brown, Susan McDonald, and Julie Ann Michaelson is a new director serving her first term.

We sincerely thank retiring Director Gaile Ramey for her service and hope she remains an active member for years to come.

OFFICERS

Julie Wagner, President

Julie grew up on the Connecticut shoreline and has deep family roots in Connecticut. She is encouraged by the conservation movement's increasing focus on equitable access to the benefits of nature. She is an active member of her religious community. Professionally, Julie is Professor at the UConn schools of medicine and dental medicine where she conducts behavioral diabetes research in severely under-resourced settings in the US and the developing world, using community-based methods that democratize science. This will be Julie's second term as president.

Gordon Hutchinson, Vice President

As graduate of Fordham College and the Medical Faculty of the University of Zürich, Gordon is a recently retired

rheumatologist and Associate Professor of Clinical Medicine at the Yale School of Medicine. Prior to that he was in the private practice of rheumatology in New Haven for over 30 years, Chief of the Rheumatology Section at the Hospital of St. Raphael and intimately involved with the teaching of rheumatology to internal medicine residents and Yale fellows. He has lived with his wife, Margrit, and their two children in Branford for over 40 years. They are life-long walkers (have dog), hikers, joggers and bikers and have enjoyed the trails of Branford, Connecticut and New England for many years. He continues to enjoy the work on the Trails Committee and the camaraderie of the trail crew.

Liz Donegan

Liz grew up in New Haven, but spent nine years in Boston and then a little over 20 years in Chicago before returning to Stony Creek in 2019. She was a practicing commercial interior designer for 10 years before switching careers to the book business 12 years ago. She currently works at Breakwater Books in Guilford. She is an avid reader, hiker, kayaker and beachcomber and has recently taken up biking and fishing.

DIRECTORS

Jen Broom

Jen Broom has been on the board for three years and lived in Branford for close to twenty years. She enjoys spending time outside with her family and two dogs and can often be found on one of BLT's trails. Jen leads the Property Management Committee for BLT and has been involved in maintaining and preserving BLT's land for future generations.

Julie



Gordon



Liz



Julie Ann



Lauren Brown

Motivated by a love of the outdoors and dismay at the rapid disappearance of open space, Lauren Brown first joined the Land Trust board in 1976. She served as president from 1984-1988, and has continued to be involved. She and her husband, John Herzan, spearheaded the passage in 1987 of the state scenic roads legislation, which lends protection to beautiful byways such as Route 146, and with then Land Trust president Jeff Clark, she worked hard for the preservation of Beacon Hill. She has written two botanical field guides.

Susan McDonald

Susan McDonald is an organic gardner with a passion for native flora and fauna. She maintains a firefly sanctuary with her family and loves walking the BLT trails.

Julie Ann Michaelson

Julie Ann is a pollinator conservation specialist with the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation as well as a partner biologist with the USDA NRCS. Prior to joining Xerces she was an environmental steward with New York state parks where she monitored and managed habitat for the endangered Karner blue butterfly. As a graduate student in the Department of Entomology at Michigan State University, Julie researched the role of landscape complexity on the establishment success of a biological control agent and native parasitoid communities. When she is not working with insects Julie enjoys hiking to see insects, painting portraits of insects, and taking photos of insects. ■



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: SUSIE MCDONALD

BLT board member and native plant enthusiast, Susie McDonald has found a unique way to donate to the BLT. Susie grows chemical-free specialty cut flowers and with the help of our friends at Taken for Granite, Branford, gives away bouquets for a donation to BLT.

In addition, Susie grows native plant plugs from locally adapted ecotypic seed. During three of this summer's events, Susie offered these plants to hikers for a small donation.

Besides the benefit to the BLT, Susie is educating our members, young and old, on the role and impact these native plants have in pollination and our overall ecosystem.

People like Susie are helping BLT pursue its mission of conservation in a unique and special way. A big shout-out to Susie and we look forward to what you have to offer next year! (Photo by Susie McDonald) ■

PROGRESS AT THE LAND TRUST HOUSE

After months of planning and prepping and anticipation, work is underway on the LTH rehab. We are thrilled that several steps of the project are already completed thanks to the building committee led by Bill Chapin!

First, the schoolhouse windows, thought to be from the original 1865 building, were restored. A Connecticut expert in historic restoration took them to his workshop, replaced broken glass with intact historic glass, restored the wood, applied weather-stripping and reinstalled them. The restorer found several layers of paint (white, blue, red) and we opted to have him repaint them the red color that best reflects what we can see from old photographs. This project was supported by a grant from the 1772 Foundation.

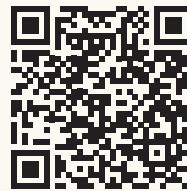
Second, the septic system has been installed and has passed inspection! This is thanks to a grant from the Community Foundation for Greater New Haven. Pictured here is Rabbi Rayzl Feuer and BLT volunteers expressing our appreciation to the trees that were harvested to make room for the septic. A local sawyer skillfully milled them into lumber that can be turned into other beautiful creations. Are you an artist or a wood worker? What can you imagine?

Third, the property behind BLT has been regraded to improve drainage and thus protect the wooden buildings. Fourth, we finished necessary asbestos remediation. Fifth, the new parking area is in place! The crushed stone is a semi-permeable cover that is more environmentally friendly

than paving. BLT appreciates the patience of our neighbors while the heavy machinery was on site.

What's up next? Before the new year, we will install a new HVAC system — with energy efficient air-sourced heatpumps — work that is supported by a generous donation from Lea Brilmayer and Bill Horne. And, we will seed the exposed soil behind LTH with local native wildflower seeds that have been collected by volunteers Lauren Brown, Susie McDonald, Heather Wells-Sweeney and Ivy Kim.

2025 will bring next steps (and no doubt new challenges) in restoring our beloved LTH to achieve structural integrity, energy efficiency and historical preservation under the direction of architect Rick Wies. We have been very fortunate to receive some funding for this project, but there continues to be a great need for additional support — we are about ½ way towards our \$300,000 goal. Please donate to the preservation of this community treasure. (Photos by Jonathan Katz, Bill Chapin) ■



*DONATE NOW!
Read more about the
ongoing Land Trust House
restoration and make a
donation today!*



Before the trees behind the Land Trust House were harvested, a group of about 20 people, including board members and volunteers, met behind LTH for poetry, prayer, and the opportunity to share our love of trees, led by Rabbi Rayzl Feuer. (Photo by Jamie Ficker)



Members of the Buildings Committee. L-R are Joan Merrick, Max Buntun, Phil Carloni, Harry Merrick, Rick Wies, Bill Horne, Greg Ames, Gordon Hutchinson, and Bill Chapin. (Photo by Julie Wagner)



CALL FOR ARTISTS

For the higher quality lumber we hope to have local crafts people create woodworking pieces that BLT can use for fundraising. If you are a woodworker, please consider donating your time and talent to BLT! We would be honored to feature your artistry that will give the trees new life.

OUT AND ABOUT WITH THE BLT



CLCC CONFERENCE

Representing the BLT at the Connecticut Land Conservation Council Conference in March were Heather Sweeney, board member Bill Chapin, president Julie Wagner, and Vice President Gordon Hutchinson. The all-day event was held at Wesleyan. Billed as the "Woodstock for Land Trusts," it was a productive day of learning with lectures, workshops and a chance to interact with others from Land Trusts across the state.



VAN WIE WOODS ASSESSMENT

In September, David Irvin, Central District Service Forester and Jane Seymour, DEEP Wildlife Biologist (front L-R) assessed BLT's Van Wie Woods to discuss ways to improve forest health and later provided a 30-page detailed report. Pictured from BLT (back row L-R) are Bob Baker, Gordon Hutchinson, Matt Reed, Bill Chapin and Dave McKay. Present but not pictured were also Dave DeBell, Lauren Brown, Bill Horne, John Ruckes, and Julie Wagner.



WILDFLOWER AND INVASIVES WALKS

Two summer walks were held at the Jarvis Creek Preserve where walkers explored the panoply of both wildflowers and invasive plant species. The walks were led by Lauren Brown and Patrick Sweeney, co-chairs of the Native Plant Protection Corps (NPPC). The NPPC, sponsored jointly by the BLT and the Town Conservation and Environment Commission, is a group of volunteers who coordinate regular work parties to control the spread of non-native invasive plants on both BLT and Town-owned conservation lands. (Photos by William Canosa)



OUT AND ABOUT WITH THE BLT



MEMBERS ONLY EVENT: HOW TO TAKE GREAT NATURE PHOTOS

BLT members joined local photographer Jamie Ficker to learn how to take great nature photos with a smartphone. The workshop was the first event at Todds Hill Wet Meadow Preserve, which offered stunning views of meadows, two ponds, and mature trees in fall foliage display. The tips and tricks she shared resulted in some gorgeous images!



BRANFORD FESTIVAL

Ellen Skinner, Derek Nong, Clare Hambly, and Harry Merrick were a few of the BLT representatives at the 2024 Branford Festival.



BUG OUT! A FOREST INSECT WALK

During BUG OUT! A Forest Insect Walk in September, hikers explored the Pisgah Brook and Saltonstall Mountain Preserves with Julie Ann Michaelson. They learned about the role of insects in forests, and identified the beneficial bugs they encountered along the trail.





BRANFORD
LAND TRUST

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“During a time when I was unsure what my professional future held, long walks in the Land Trust woods calmed my jangled nerves. I continue to turn to the lovingly maintained Land Trust trails as a reservoir of perspective, inspiration, and joy.”

— BLT Member

(Photo by Jamie Ficker)