



BRANFORD LAND TRUST

SUMMER 2026 • VOLUME 36, NUMBER 1

PRESIDENT'S LETTER: STRONG TOGETHER!

The BLT is all about BIODIVERSITY! There is an extraordinary variety of living things on Earth — flora, fauna, and fungi — that weave together our complex ecosystems. Biodiversity is the web of life that sustains our precious planet. Biodiversity is also a safety net, creating resilience to natural disasters, diseases, pests, and climate shifts. Every living thing — from microorganisms to blue whales — plays a specific role in keeping natural communities functioning.

Taking a cue from the natural world, we know that there is strength in our diverse human community, too. At the BLT, we celebrate human diversity and want to welcome everyone — all of you — to love and care for our beautiful planet. Here are a few things we've been doing lately to strengthen that diversity.

At the beginning of the year when you received your membership renewal form, did you notice the new Pay What You Can option? This ensures that everyone who believes

in our mission, regardless of their financial circumstances, can join forces with the BLT.

While most of our events and programs are free and open to the public, becoming a member helps support our work behind the scenes, including managing 1,000+ acres of open space, maintaining 30+ miles of hiking trails here in Branford, and coordinating more than two dozen events and programs throughout the year.

Did you get a chance to hear the guest speaker for our annual meeting in May? Justin Brownell, a Branford local, is an amputee who has competed in triathlons and has climbed Mount Kilimanjaro, among other peaks. Justin spoke about the role that organizations like the BLT play in the sense of 'belonging' in nature for people with disabilities. You can see his talk here: tinyurl.com/BLTannual26.

When you were at the annual meeting, did you notice there was remote, simultaneous American Sign

Language (ASL) interpretation? We're working to make sure that those in our community who communicate with ASL are included and made to feel welcome at our events, and we received very positive feedback from members of our Deaf community who were in attendance at the annual meeting.

We want everyone to feel welcome at our events and as part of our organization — the BLT is for every body! Bringing all the members of our community together allows us to amplify our conservation efforts, share our skills and resources, and work to overcome the many challenges facing our environment. Do you have ideas on how we can reach more people in our community? Please let us know.

Together, we are stronger! ■

Julie Wagner, President



Faith-based groups continue to volunteer on our properties. Here a picture from June of Vox Church working to maintain our Todds Hill Wet Meadow Preserve.



We partnered with Evergreen Woods so our hikes committee could lead residents on a hike through our Short Beach Preserve; and Tom Cleveland presented a talk at Evergreen Woods about the Branford Supply Pond fish ladder.



We offer kids programs like Making Fairy Houses and our annual Environmental Day Camp at Killam's Point. (Children ages 5-9 can attend the camp, and scholarships are available.)



P.O. Box 254
Branford, CT 06405
(203) 483-5263
branfordlandtrust.org

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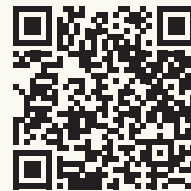
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MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

"I have lived in Branford for 4.5 years, but I have learned more about the town in the past year as a member of the Branford Land Trust than I did in the 3.5 years before. Through the Land Trust, I've hiked trails I never knew existed and become more knowledgeable about invasive plants by participating in work parties to help preserve open space. Best of all, I've met many kind-hearted people who care deeply about protecting Branford's natural spaces for everyone to enjoy." - Wendy, New Member

Whether you've recently joined or have been a long-standing member, thank you for your commitment to the protection and acquisition of Branford's open spaces. If you haven't yet, please consider joining or renewing your 2026 membership today!

Your support empowers and connects the community through education and access to the precious natural habitat that we all share, and that we are honored to steward.



Contact heidi.richard4@gmail.com with membership questions or to be sure we have your email address on file for announcements.



You are never too young for the BLT! Recent Board Member Jake Dittes and his 15-day-old son Leo taking his first walk on a Land Trust Preserve (Short Beach).

UPCOMING EVENTS

August KIDS BUG WALK

Watch for dates and details!

November 7 FOREST MANAGEMENT WALK

Join us for an educational walk in the Van Wie and Quarry Preserves with CT State Forester David Irwin.

November 22 ANNUAL VAN WIE WALK

Come along on our annual November hike through the Van Wie Woods. Explore and enjoy the extensive trails of the 100-acre preserve — fields, woodlands, streams, and granite outcrops — donated by two generations of the Van Wie family.

January 1 ANNUAL FIRST DAY WALK

Start off the New Year with a walk in the fresh air! Join the Branford Land Trust as we explore the DeLeo and Pisgah Preserves on Friday, January 1.

Visit our website for details on the events you see listed above. They're all open to the public: why not bring a friend?



INVASIVE SPOTLIGHT

COMMON MUGWORT (ARTEMISIA VULGARIS)

Common Mugwort is a familiar perennial with aggressive establishment on roadsides, right-of-way areas, and disturbed and uncultivated areas. It can grow 2-5 feet tall. Its leaves alternate with green on upper surface, while undersides are covered with dense white to gray hairs. The foliage is aromatic, with a chrysanthemum or sage-like odor. Its stems are a purplish-brown, branched, and covered with short hairs, and it has inconspicuous yellowish flowers that lack petals.

Mugwort spreads primarily by aggressive rhizomes (horizontal underground stems), which form large, fast-spreading patches and can also reproduce by seed.

To prevent seed dispersal, mow from early summer to mid-September, before seedhead production or before seed has matured. The first two weeks of September are the best time to mow. (See link below for more about mowing.)

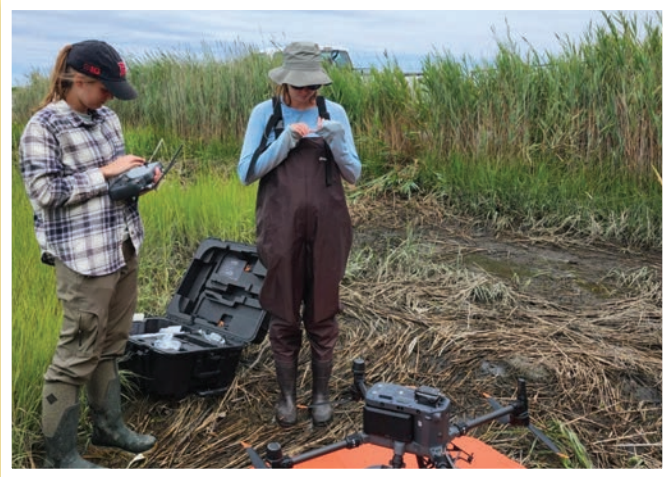
Hand pulling very young plants in spring or early summer, before formation of rhizomes, may keep spread of populations in check and prevent establishment. A heavy-duty landscape fabric or other impenetrable mulch can be used to smother mugwort.

Common mugwort, native to Europe and Eastern Asia, was brought into North America as early as the 1600s for medicinal purposes. It spread throughout the Northeastern U.S. as a contaminant on ships and nurseries. Mugwort pollen is a common cause of allergies and hay fever, wherever abundant. Common mugwort is found throughout much of the northeast, extending west to Minnesota and south to scattered areas in Florida. Many counties in Oregon and Washington have also reported large populations.

Find more info: tinyurl.com/Uconnmugwort. ■

SOURCE: UCONN College of Agriculture, Health and Natural Resources, Connecticut Invasive Plant Working Group

IN THE FIELD: RECENT RESEARCH PROJECTS



JARVIS CREEK FIELDWORK

From *Therese Apuzzo, Graduate Student, Coastal Disturbance Ecology Lab, School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences, Stony Brook University*

In the summer of 2025, researchers from the Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk and Stony Brook University spent time studying the Jarvis Creek salt marsh as part of a project funded by the Long Island Sound Partnership. Salt marshes are intertidal wetlands that provide many benefits to coastal communities including protection from storm surge and coastal flooding. Marshes are habitat for many species of fish, birds, and invertebrates and act as natural water filtration systems. However, they are currently threatened by increasing rates of sea level rise and can be further impacted by human activities. In order to survive, salt marshes must continue to build up sediment at a faster pace than sea level rise through a process called accretion. The goal of this project is to analyze what drives salt marsh accretion in eleven marshes in the Long Island Sound. By finding the major contributors to salt marsh decline or resilience, marshes can be better protected.

In order to analyze these drivers, the team took a variety of measurements at Jarvis Creek including estimates of vegetation biomass, decomposition rates, and submergence frequency. They also captured multispectral imagery using a drone for a fine-scale map of vegetation communities. They will be analyzing these measurements in combination with landscape variables and the restoration history of the marsh. This comprehensive data will inform management recommendations for the Jarvis Creek marsh. Further, this work will contribute to a broader understanding of salt marsh health in the Long Island Sound. Work will continue



in the summer of 2026 as researchers analyze vegetation communities and elevation in Jarvis Creek. The scientists are grateful to all the members of the Branford Land Trust for their support of this research! ■

PHOTOS, CLOCKWISE:

- Stony Brook University graduate students setting for a drone flight.*
- Stony Brook University graduate student identifying vegetation species.*
- Researchers from the Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk taking shear vane measurements, used to assess soil strength.*



CONNECTICUT'S SALT MARSHES

From *Sam Blair, MESC '26, Yale School of the Environment*

Connecticut's salt marshes are on the front lines of climate change, and a great deal of effort has gone towards studying their changing ecosystem dynamics and testing adaptive approaches to their restoration and management. But marshes aren't just ecosystems—they're also social systems, shaped by institutions, technologies, and ideas. If history is any guide, marshes' "social lives" will play a key role in determining their futures; yet these lives are underrepresented in existing scientific and regulatory models.

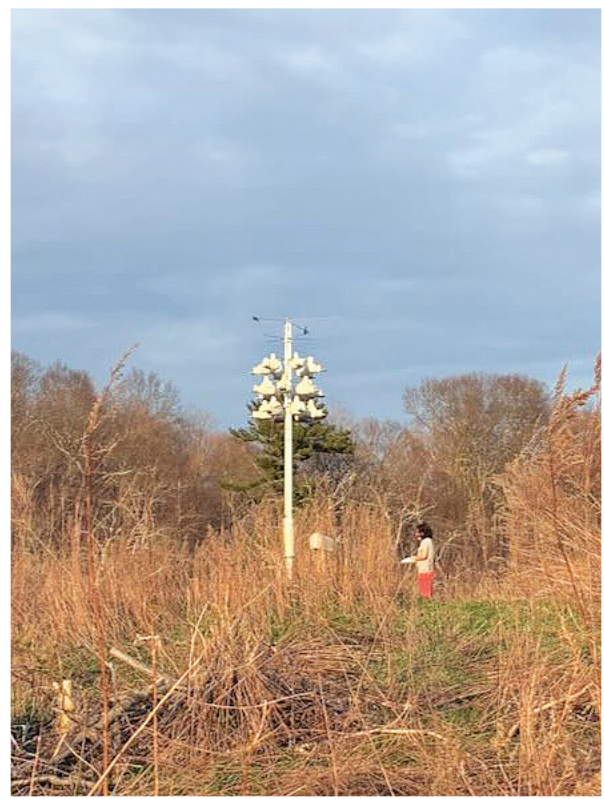
Over two years of research for my Master's of Environmental Science degree, I asked what Connecticut marshes' "social lives" look like today, how they're changing, and what those changes might suggest for the future. My fieldwork took me from marshes to conference rooms, back porches, and boat launches. Ultimately, I spoke with ninety five informants—regulators, scientists, managers, and community members—and visited twenty four marshes, including four sites managed by the Branford Land Trust.

My research shows that change in Connecticut's coastal wetlands is often driven by forces we don't usually think of as ecological. These include the internal politics of state and federal regulatory bodies; the scientific challenges of modelling complex systems; and local communities' struggles over political and cultural identity. While climate change and other ecological perturbations will undoubtedly shape the future of Connecticut's salt marshes, my results suggest that changes to the social processes associated with marsh governance could be equally, if not more, transformative. What would happen if we saw the "social lives" of salt marshes as a resource as rich, varied, and potentially vulnerable as the marshes themselves? ■

PURPLE MARTINS MONITORING

by Julie Wagner

Last year, with the assistance of volunteers from the Menunkatuck Audubon Society, the Branford Land Trust installed and is closely monitoring nesting gourds for purple martins. Due to co-evolution with humans, purple martins would likely disappear as a breeding bird in eastern North America if humans were to stop supplying martins with homes. (West of the Rocky Mountains, purple martins still nest in natural cavities in dead trees or cliffs.) Purple martins have declined in numbers over much of their eastern range, including Connecticut. Competition from more aggressive, non-native European starlings and house sparrows for the nesting compartments people offer has contributed to this decline. Pesticide use and prolonged weather extremes also have reduced martin numbers. A small group of BLT volunteers has taken responsibility for monitoring our purple martin housing, including 11-year old Roberta "Rosie" Kim. If you would like to join the team to monitor these birds, please let us know via the help/volunteer tab at branfordlandtrust.org. ■



THANK YOU AND WELCOME NEW BOARD MEMBERS

The Branford Land Trust Board of Directors is pleased to announce the election of three officers and five directors to the Board at the Spring Annual Meeting. Newly elected or re-elected officers serve two-year terms with a maximum of three consecutive terms. Directors serve three-year terms with a maximum of two consecutive terms.

The membership elected Julie Wagner as President, Clare Hambly as Vice-President, and Betsy Herlihy as Corresponding Secretary.

Four Directors elected for three-year terms are Wendy Duby, Chris Edmonds, Gordon Hutchinson, and David McKay. David DeBell will fill an open two-year slot.

We sincerely thank retiring directors Bill Chapin and Jake Dittes for their service on the Board of Directors. We look forward to Bill continuing his outstanding leadership as he directs the restoration of the Land Trust House in Stony Creek. And through his position at Save the Sound, Jake will continue to collaborate with BLT on restoration efforts in the Farm River Marsh.

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 using community-based methods that democratize science. This will be Julie's third term as president.

Julie



Clare



Betsy



Dave D.



DIRECTORS

David DeBell

Dave spent his summers growing up in Branford and has had a home here with his family for 40 years enjoying the trails, sand and sun in Hotchkiss Grove. He graduated from Hope College as a biology major going on to earn his MD from St Georges University. He was in solo, group and large group clinical practice with a focus on population health with Summit Medical Group. After retiring three years ago from his Internal Medicine practice in New Jersey, he and Diane moved here to enjoy their family and friends in Branford. Working on the trails crew for the BLT energizes his lifelong love of hiking and being outdoors. After having finished the Master Woodlands Manager program this year, he looks forward to working with the BLT for the conservation of its uniquely beautiful properties. He believes that the Branford Land Trust gives him and the community of Branford the privilege of access to open space and the health benefits that it offers.

Wendy Duby

Wendy joins the board after retiring from a multi-decade career in accounting and manufacturing. Wendy and her husband moved to Branford five years ago after living in North Haven for almost 24 years. She loves life on the water and, now that she has time available, loves to bird watch, hike, snowshoe, paddleboard, sail, garden and through the Land Trust is learning about managing invasive plants. Part of her interest in serving on the Land Trust Board comes from her love of the outdoors that started as a child at her family cabin in the Adirondacks. She loves that the Land Trust wants to make the outdoors accessible for all people. Wendy is a graduate of Merrimack College and has an MBA from Quinnipiac University.

Wendy



Chris



Chris Edmonds

Chris moved to Short Beach, Branford in 1985. He is an attorney/CPA with his office in Branford. Chris has long enjoyed the outdoors. He has hiked throughout Connecticut and the Long Trail in Vermont. In 1981 he took a Hurricane Island Outward Bound Course in Maine then spent the next several years becoming an EMT and a Coast Guard licensed captain. He realized that he really wanted to become an Outward Bound Instructor. He was invited to Outward Bound staff training in 1984. He has taught Outward Bound courses in Maine and Florida since then. Chris enjoys the BLT trails and Long Island Sound.

Gordon Hutchinson

Gordon is a 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 and Chief of the Rheumatology Section at the Hospital of St. Raphael. 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 as active AMC members for many years. He recently completed the Master Woodland Manager course given by CF&P/UConn. No longer the Vice President of the BLT, he continues to enjoy the work on the Property Management Committee and the camaraderie of the Trail & Fields Crew.

David McKay

David worked as an OB/GYN for many years in Massachusetts and retired in 2020. Along with his wife Nancy he moved to Branford in 2023 to be closer to family. He currently manages the Branford Land Trust Maintenance Crew. He is also a member of the Property Management and Hikes committees. He became a member of the Board in the summer of 2025. He currently is Steward for Saltonstall SSA-9. His hobbies include hiking, gardening, landscaping, motorcycling and being Poppy to his grandchildren. ■

Gordon



& Uschi

David M.



FISH LADDER CELEBRATION

by Tom Cleveland

Under the wings of whirling ospreys, the Town of Branford gathered to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the opening of the Supply Ponds Fish Ladder on Saturday, April 25th. Schools of 10" fish called alewives were swimming cheek-to-cheek and then up the fish ladder to lay their eggs into the Supply Ponds and on through the Queach Brook watershed up to Lindsley Lake and even Cedar Lake just as they have done for over 10,000 years.

Alewives and their cousins, blueback herring, are anadromous fish, that is, they spawn in fresh water but spend their adult lives in the ocean. They are critical food – everything eats them! Bluefish, striped bass, whales, sharks, seals, cormorants, ospreys, racoons, and even black bears! Before Europeans created dams on all the streams and rivers, these fish brought tons of food back to coastal forests, so much so that we can still detect ocean isotopes from their bodies within a quarter mile of most watercourses. Towns like Branford have built 65 fish ladders throughout Connecticut to restore fish back to 10-15% of their ancestral spawning grounds – there are still 4,000 dams in the State, many of which block spawning herring.

Over 100 people including many kids, young families, and longtime Branford Land Trust members, showed up to welcome the river herring back to Branford. All celebrated with live acoustic music, face painting, alewife crafts from BLT and the Denison Pequotsepos Nature Center and

information tables from Save the Sound, Branford Historical Society, an aquatic insect display from the Xerxes Society, a fish tank, a kid's binocular station and a display of fish-eating bird skulls. We had short speeches from Josh Brooks, First Selectman, Steve Gephard, DEEP fishway emeritus and Kevin Job, his worthy DEEP successor and passionate fisheries advocate. Jane Bouley, Branford Town Historian emeritus spoke about the history of the Supply Ponds. The spirit of the day was captured by poet Steve Mentz, and Courtney Cucinotta, a North Branford indigenous leader. All inspired us to see Branford and the world with new eyes.

The Branford Land Trust built the fish ladder in 2005 on the Supply Ponds owned by the Town of Branford. In a great show of trust, the Town gave the land trust permission to raise \$203,000, hire Nathan L. Jacobson Associates as the specialist engineers and Pinder Construction as the contractor. Both firms had expertise working on water projects and fishways. Steve Gephard, the then fisheries biologist at DEEP, and an internationally known fishway expert, advised the land trust throughout the 3 years that it took to organize the money, permits and talent needed.

Then, it took only 3 months to

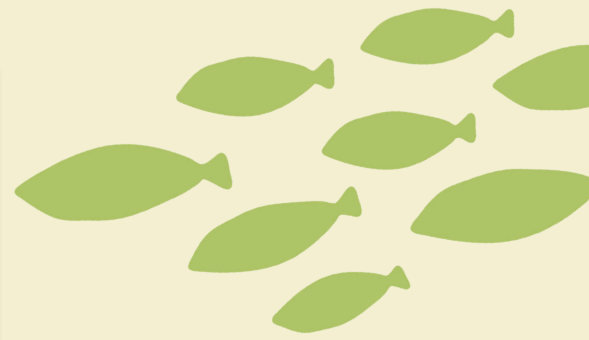
actually build the fish ladder! Rich Pinder, Jr. and a helper sawed into the dam to cast the concrete exit structure and leveled a bed onto which the fishway sections would sit. The Stony Creek Quarry delivered over 200 tons of stone soon after the welded aluminum sections came down from Newcastle, ME. A big excavator laid the flat granite slabs on top of the berm into which the fishway sections were locked, creating a walkable surface that let the public experience the fishway up close. Four 10 ton blocks were laid across the Queach Brook upstream of the fishway entrance to guide the herring into the fishway entrance.

In the last two years, herring have returned in great numbers; 23,000 in 2025 and over 11,000 so far in 2026 – more than returned in all years prior. This is because big commercial trawlers were prohibited from fishing where our herring congregate off of Cape Cod and Long Island for the last two years. Sadly, regulators plan to allow these trawlers back in 2026 and 2027 unless we get changes made to the regulations.

If you wish to stay abreast of fish ladder news (and to lobby for herring!), contact Tom Cleveland at tom.clevelandjr@gmail.com. ■



Clockwise: 1) Local naturalist Chris Woerner, 2) Courtney Cucinotta and Tom Cleveland, 3) Jane Bouley and Julie Wagner, and 4) local musicians Patrick Gazda and Tomcat Bob. Photos by Wendy Burton, Courtney Cucinotta, and Julie Wagner.



FISH LADDER

Tom Cleveland

On the occasion of the opening of the Branford Supply Pond Fish Ladder, 2006

Alewives may be running, swimming,
schooling –
Pushing on with light and grace,
Towards evening circles soon, in water
warm,
They make their nest.
Then rise in floods of tiny silver,
And sweep to marsh and on to ocean
Where forever and four years,
They swell and flash till so full grown
Again to Branford, home they come!

FISH AND LADDERS: A SONNET

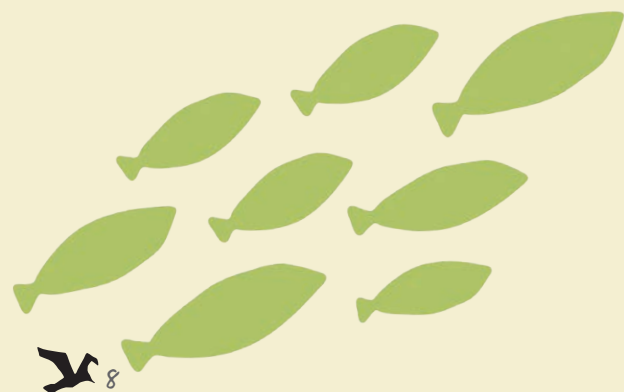
Steve Mentz

What fish of ladders know is not certain –
We think of water, of flows and pressure,
Of worlds chill and wet, an iron curtain
Between you and me and water's
treasure.

And ladders? Machines against gravity,
Steps upon discrete steps. Fish have no
feet,
Walk no walks, feel no wet depravity
Nor sloshy finprints dampen no concrete.

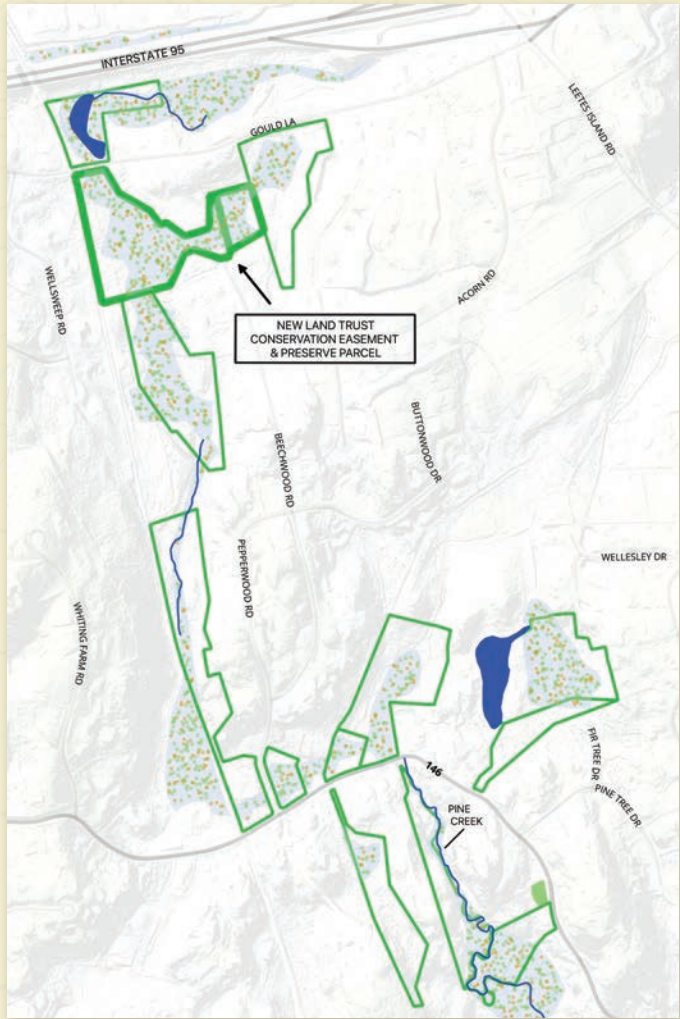
To ascend! Up, up, past water and air
From sea through stream they splash and
jack-knif'd swim
As if progressing slowly up a stair
Into freshwater bubbles like a hymn.

Shall we ladder ourselves entwined with
fish?
Repairing this world is our fondest wish.



WETLANDS PROTECTED ON GOULD LANE

Text by Lauren Brown and Bill Horne. Maps provided by Pete Gloor.



In the summer of 2025, the Planning and Zoning Commission approved an application for a three-lot residential subdivision at 19-37 Gould Lane, a 12.8-acre property to the east of the Tilcon rail line (see map). Residential subdivision projects in Branford are required to set aside at least 10% of the property as open space, which is customarily conveyed to the Land Trust. For this application, the owner set aside about 1.5 acres of wetlands that abut a 5.5-acre parcel already owned by BLT.

In this case, the Town Planner also requested that the owner place a conservation easement on 7.4 acres that includes much of the large wetland area remaining within the house lots, which cannot be developed under Town regulations and state statutes, and that the Land Trust accept the easement. The owner and BLT agreed to do so.

A conservation easement is a mechanism for open space preservation where the owner gives up the right to develop or conduct certain specified activities (typically erecting structures, cutting trees and shrubs, dumping and other things with negative impacts on the environmental values of the property). In accepting the easement, the easement recipient acquires the right and responsibility to stop any prohibited activity and take action to remediate damage if a violation occurs. The most important aspect of a conservation easement is that it runs with the property, i.e. future owners are also bound by its terms. The Land Trust currently holds easements on all or part of 13 properties, and as we do for our own properties, we inspect all our easements every year to check for encroachments or other problems. The Gould Lane easement specifies that the BLT can access the easement area and a narrow strip of upland along the edge of the conserved wetland in order to conduct its inspections. The terms of the easement are part of the recorded deeds, thereby ensuring that future buyers are aware of the restrictions and the access provisions.

While many BLT members and other Branford residents are familiar with the roughly 25 Land Trust preserves and properties protected by conservation easements with trails and other recreational opportunities, well over half of BLT properties, like the those described here, are not suitable for hiking or other activities. Rather, they are undeveloped lands that are now conserved forever, for the benefit of our air, the climate, waterways, plants and wildlife. The importance of protecting the wetland on the Gould Lane property extends beyond the property itself. The open space set-aside and conservation easement connect several previously protected properties to the east and south, and the water leaving the site flows under Gould Lane into a small pond on another BLT property and from there under I-95 as it flows toward the Branford River (see map). Together, these properties form an important north-south green corridor in the eastern part of Branford.

We are privileged to permanently protect the ferns and sedges, the winterberry and spicebush, the salamanders and frogs, and the host of other species that call this habitat home. ■

Click here for
a bird's eye view
of the property.



WRANGLING INDEED!



THE INVASIVES WRANGLERS AT WORK: Joe Misdraji and Alex Monin exemplified the meaning of Wranglers as they wrested tree-sized winged euonymus bushes out of the ground at our Flax Mill Preserve on a humid day in June. And check out Andrea Chapin's good work! They are all part of the Branford Invasives Wranglers, a joint volunteer effort of the Land Trust and the Branford Conservation Commission to control invasive plant populations on selected Town and Land Trust preserves. Want to help? Email info@branfordlandtrust.org. ■

NATIONAL WETLAND CONDITION ASSESSMENT

The BLT is participating in the National Wetland Condition Assessment. It is a study of the current conditions of approximately 900 randomly selected sampling locations in 48 states in 2026.

Under the auspices of the US Environmental Protection Agency, it is assessing the quality of our nation's waters in cooperation with state agencies, tribes, and private landowners. The assessment includes water chemistry, plant surveys, soil sampling and habitat conditions. The findings are for scientific purposes, not enforcement or regulatory purposes.

The BLT is happy to contribute to this effort and has given permission for the study on our property near Talmadge Pond. Talmadge Pond is a 3-acre waterbody located in Short Beach neighborhood. We look forward to seeing the findings when they are eventually posted the EPA's NWCA website: www.epa.gov/national-aquatic-resource-surveys/nwca. ■

Click here for ways YOU
can support the BLT and
all of these community
programs:



branfordlandtrust.org/help

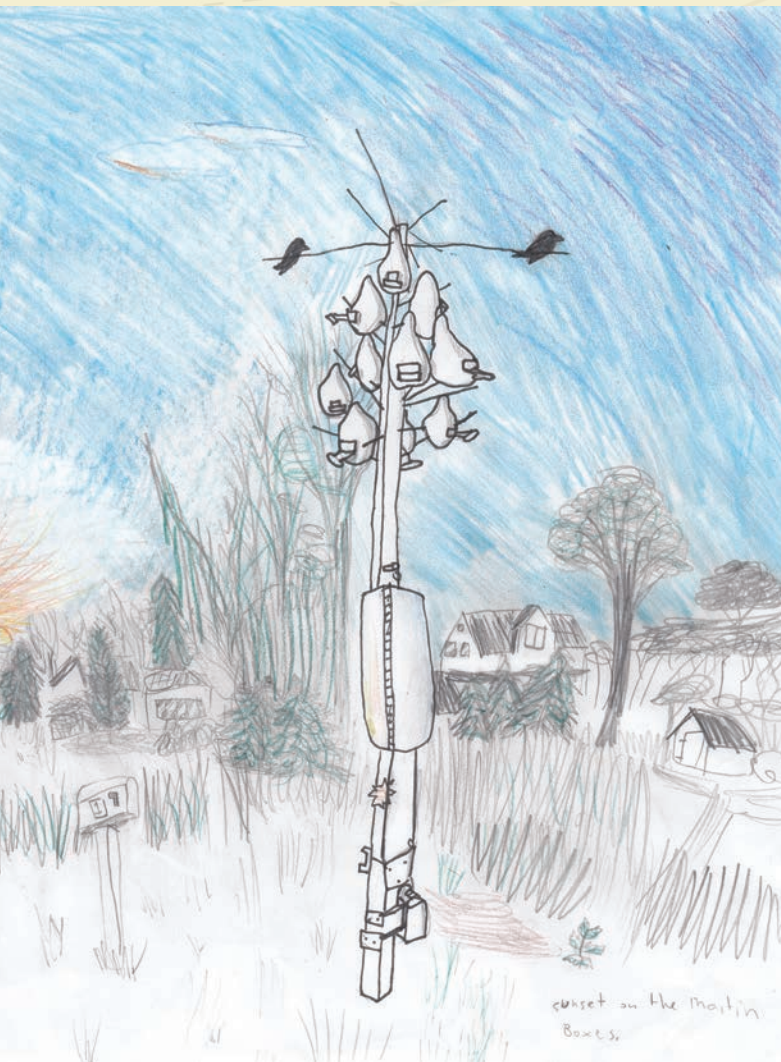


BRANFORD
LAND TRUST

P.O. Box 254
Branford, CT 06405



After you read this newsletter,
don't just toss it in the recycling
bin, pass it on to a friend!



Purple martins are a species of birds that has become reliant on humans for nesting areas. People are worried that the martins will not know where to nest if human structures do not have the required spaces, so the Land Trust has set up nest boxes for the birds to live in. They overwinter in Brazil, and then migrate back to North America to lay their eggs. I have been working to check the boxes for nesting purple martins and eggs. There haven't been any so far, but the birds are only getting started! The nest boxes are shaped like large, plastic gourds, due to the past practice of carving out a certain variety of gourd and putting it outside for the birds to nest in. Since purple martins have grown accustomed to artificial housing, hopefully they will nest in these plastic gourds as eagerly as they do in real ones.

— ROBERTA KIM, AGE 11