



# BRANFORD LAND TRUST

SPRING 2017 • VOL. 27, NO. 1

## BY THE NUMBERS: RED HILL WOODS SUCCESS!



### RED HILL WOODS & Spectacle Island

Below, BLT President Pete Raymond accepts a check from Branford Rotary President Dave Kozma. The Rotary donated \$800 to the campaign!

**W**e did it! With support and contributions from our members and the community, we have met our goal, raising **\$201,260** to preserve Red Hill Woods and Spectacle Island!

Spectacle Island, offshore from Indian Neck, is a bare granite outcrop island west of the historic Thimbles. "Spec" is undeveloped and remains an active nesting area of **hundreds** of sea birds, and is a resting spot for migrating seals. Red Hill Woods is a stunning **29-acre** parcel at the end of Red Hill Road, just north of **950** acres of already-protected open space.

Since beginning the campaign in June, more than **300** Branford residents, local businesses and organizations, and Land Trust supporters from **13** states have contributed over **\$110,000**. In November, the Land Trust was awarded a **\$91,000** Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant by the Connecticut Department of Energy and the Environment. Additionally, the Land Trust has welcomed more than **100** new members!

Close to **250** hikers of all ages have taken advantage of Land Trust-hosted walks to get acquainted with Red Hill Woods. On January 1, more than **80** walkers explored Red Hill Woods at our annual New Year's Day walk.

Immediately after closing, Land Trust crews wasted no time beginning their work of stewarding the new property. Volunteers cleared more than **50** large bags of trash, **30** tires, and miscellaneous debris from areas next to or downstream of I-95. A new **mile-long** loop trail has been created and blazed, taking walkers from the Branford Trail through several spectacular groves of mountain laurel and around wetlands. A planned bog walk will bring hikers and Branford students onto the floodplain wetland. It will be a carefully boarded route over the wetlands and across the stream, giving walkers of all ages a rare opportunity to view the wetlands that are so unique to the area.



Support for Red Hill Woods included **17** unique wedding gifts. When BLT members Ellen Matloff and Mike Bowler were married in October, the bride and groom asked for guests to donate to the Red Hill Woods fundraiser in lieu of presents. This is a remarkable gesture to our community and the members of the Branford Land Trust.

Special thanks to the **2 dozen** volunteers who helped with the Red Hill Woods fundraiser, as well as to the Branford Community Foundation, Guilford Land Conservation Trust, Branford Rotary Club, Alcoa-Howmet, Forma Therapeutics, American Polyfilm, Laticrete International and Denali/Trailblazer for their support of our efforts. ■



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The mission of the Branford Land Trust is to preserve open space in Branford, and to promote our community's appreciation of Branford's diverse natural features.

## **PRESIDENT'S LETTER**

The year 1967 was part of a different era. The Beatles released Sgt. Pepper's, Carl Yastrzemski won the triple-crown, and the U.S. was at war in Vietnam. The environment in the U.S. was also in distress. Air and water quality were at all-time lows and the use of DDT was rampant, wiping out the osprey population in this area.

It was also in 1967 that forward-thinking citizens of Branford created the Branford Land Trust. The goal these founders set for the BLT remains today: *to preserve and protect open space in Branford*. Currently the Land Trust owns more than 1,000 acres of land throughout town and works diligently to protect and provide access to this open space. Members also educate our community on its ecology and benefits it provides.

Surviving 50 years was not a guarantee. Many land trusts struggle with the tasks and responsibilities that evolve from such a growing portfolio of open space. The BLT is lucky in that there has been and continues to be a very long list of Branford citizens who have stepped up and supported the organization by volunteering their time and donating their hard-earned money to the goal of protecting open space. We are grateful to all of you—and look forward to celebrating these first 50 years of success in the coming months!

For now, know that the BLT is working to ensure that open space continues to be a priority and that our holdings remain intact for future generations. In 2016, we committed to seeking accreditation under the Land Trust Alliance, a land conservation organization that represents more than 1,000 land trusts and five million members nationwide. This accreditation is a systematic process that makes sure a land trust meets stringent and specific quality standards. As such, accreditation is a mark of distinction that sends a clear signal to donors, potential members, and insurers that a land trust is a well-run organization. It ensures the proper checks and balances are in place so that the BLT can build on the accomplishments of its first five decades and look ahead to continued success in our future.

Pete Raymond, President



## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Annual Meeting

**May 24**

Wednesday, 7pm

Come to the 50th Anniversary kick off at the Blackstone Memorial Library. Includes brief business meeting and guest speaker.

### Winter/Spring Lecture Series

**April 26**

**A PLACE CALLED HOPE**

Wednesday, 7pm

Join us for a close-up view of live birds of prey at the Blackstone Memorial Library. Learn each bird's story of survival and ways to lessen conflicts with the wildlife in your very own backyard.

### Nature Explorer Program

**June 4**

**FLORA WALK AT VEDDER PRESERVE**

Saturday, 2pm

Lauren Brown will lead us on a late spring walk at the Vedder Preserve to observe and identify native plants and flowers. Meet in Stony Creek at the far end of West Point Road, which is across from the Willoughby Wallace Library. For info, call 203-415-1571.

### CT Trails Day

**June 3**

**BLT CT TRAILS DAY HIKE: STONY CREEK QUARRY PRESERVE**

Saturday, 9:30 - 11:30am

Walk the trails of the Stony Creek Quarry and Red Hill Woods Preserves in the heart of nearly 1000 acres of preserved land. Points of interest along the 3.5 mile hike include a small Native American rock shelter and evidence of historic quarrying. Please see our website for details and directions.

### Killam's Point Events

*Co-sponsored by the First Congregational Church of Branford*

The following events will be held at Killam's Point on Shore Drive just west of the Orchard House Adult Day Care Center. Please drive SLOWLY to the end of the road to the parking area. For info, call 203-747-4184.

**June 10**

**HORSESHOE CRABS**

Saturday, 12:30 - 2:30pm

Led by local naturalist Martha Rice. Horseshoe crabs may be our oldest and best friends. Come learn about the research program under way and help measure and tag some of these fascinating creatures.

**August 12**

**EXPLORING THE POINT**

Saturday, 9am - 11am

Tidal pools, stands of pitch pines, salt marshes, inland wetlands, an osprey nest, remains of a worked quarry, invasive species - Killam's Point has something for all. The day is being planned so that young and old and everyone in between will experience the Point with newly opened eyes.

**October 21**

**A WALK THROUGH NATURAL HISTORY**

Saturday, 10am - 12noon

Come take a walk with us through natural history and enjoy crisp air, ospreys feeding for their long migration, the pinkish granite bluffs against the sparkling Sound, schools of bunker fleeing a bluefish frenzy, chipmunks and squirrels harvesting acorns, and through it all, the peace and order of an undisturbed ecological system.

### Work Parties

The work parties offer a chance to get to know BLT properties and to spend a little time with some great people. If you have school age kids, this is a chance for them to pick up some community service credits. Call Bill Horne (203-488-6146) for more information.

**April 8**

**RED HILL WOODS**

We will begin work on a bog walk through the Red Hill Woods floodplain by moving materials (210 hemlock planks, 350 cedar logs) to the work site. Meet at 9am. Bring work gloves, wear shoes/boots that are waterproof or can get wet. Call Matt Reed (203-376-6199) for details.

**April 15**

**BRANFORD RIVER AND TOWN CLEAN-UP DAY**

Watch website for info.

**May 20**

**STONY CREEK PARTNERSHIP FIELD**

We will continue the clearing of woody shrubs and trees from the field to maintain the old-field character. Meet at 9am. Bring loppers, small handsaws, sturdy hand clippers, work gloves.

**June 17**

**BRANFORD FESTIVAL**

Join us at the Land Trust booth to help set up, break down, or for an hour or two during the day to tell your friends and neighbors about how you're helping the Land Trust protect Branford's open space for future generations.

*The BLT's Trails Committee has a separate schedule of activities including blazing and trail maintenance. Please contact Matt Reed ([mwreed81@gmail.com](mailto:mwreed81@gmail.com)) to be included in the Trail Committee email list.*

# EXPLORING VERNAL PONDS IN BRANFORD

by Meredith Holgerson, Guest Writer

Spring is here, and with warmer temperatures and rainy weather, it's the perfect time to explore Branford's vernal ponds.

## WHAT'S A VERNAL POND?

Vernal ponds (also called vernal pools) are small ponds or wetlands that typically hold water for only part of the year, and are often associated with forests. Most of Connecticut's ponds fill with water in the autumn, may partially freeze over the winter, reach high water levels in the spring, and dry by late summer. Because vernal ponds dry for part of the year, they don't have fish, which is key for the survival of many amphibians and invertebrates.

## AMPHIBIANS IN VERNAL PONDS

Two key amphibians that rely almost exclusively on vernal ponds to complete their life cycle are the wood frog and the spotted salamander. Both species spend their adult life in the forest, under logs, in the leaf litter, or underground. Each spring, they migrate hundreds of meters to breed in vernal ponds. Larvae develop in the ponds over the course of the spring and summer, before metamorphosing and migrating to the forest.

**Spotted salamanders** (*Ambystoma maculatum*) are dark gray in color with bright yellow dots running down their backs. They lay egg masses that swell to the size of a grapefruit and are attached to twigs and vegetation. Salamander larvae are one of the pond's top predators.

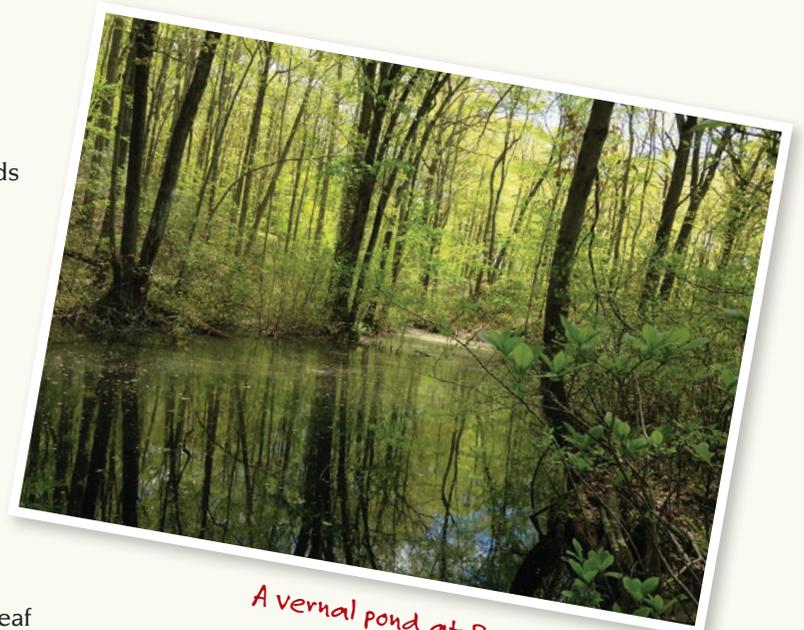
**Wood frogs** (*Rana sylvatica*) are among the first amphibians to breed and their calls represent a true sound of spring! Listen for their low, clucking call that has been compared

to a horse's hooves trotting on pavement or ducks quacking. Wood frogs breed in aggregations, which results in communal egg masses found in only a couple of spots within a pond.

## INVERTEBRATES IN VERNAL PONDS

Vernal ponds are also important habitat for many invertebrates, including:

**Fairy shrimp** (*Eubranchipus* spp.) are crustaceans that hatch from eggs laid in the pond the previous year. They



*A vernal pond at Red Hill Woods*



Under a microscope: zooplankton from a vernal pond.



Wood frog egg masses shortly after they were laid in March.



Spotted salamander egg masses in a vernal pond.

are among the first critters found in ponds each spring and complete their life cycle before many pond predators become active. As such, fairy shrimp can only be found in the ponds within 4-6 weeks after ice melt.

**Predaceous diving beetles** (Family Dytiscidae) are predators as both larvae and adults, feeding on other invertebrates and even salamander and frog larvae!

**Caddisfly larvae** (Order Trichoptera) are known for the portable cases that they make out of sticks, pine needles, leaves, and plant litter. The most common caddisfly in Connecticut vernal pools is likely *Limnephilus*, whose case is reminiscent of a log cabin. They can reach high densities in vernal ponds, and feed on decomposing leaf litter.

There are many other invertebrates that call vernal ponds home, including dragonfly and damselfly larvae, true bugs, mosquitoes, midges, and fingernail clams (just to name a few!).

#### OTHER ANIMALS USING VERNAL PONDS

In addition to providing habitat for many amphibians and invertebrates, vernal ponds are important stopover sites for mammals (including deer and raccoons), reptiles (such as turtles and snakes), and waterfowl (including wood ducks and mallards). These organisms use vernal ponds as a resting stop to get a drink of water and feast on tasty amphibian eggs and invertebrates before moving on.

#### VERNAL PONDS ARE IMPORTANT ECOSYSTEMS

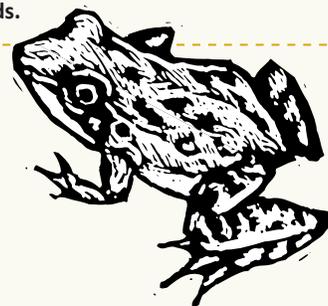
Vernal ponds also provide other valuable ecosystem services. For instance, ponds store water that would otherwise run off to streams and the ocean. By storing

water, ponds make water available for animals and also help replenish groundwater. Vernal ponds are also importantly connected to the forest. In autumn, large amounts of leaves fall into the pond basin, which are broken down by microbes and invertebrates. These leaves provide carbon, nitrogen, and phosphorus to pond organisms. Later, when many of these critters metamorphose and leave the ponds, they bring important nutrients back to the forest.

#### VERNAL POND CONSERVATION

Vernal ponds are threatened by development, habitat fragmentation, runoff from road salts and chemicals, added nutrients from leaky septic systems and fertilizer, and climate change. Because these ponds provide such important habitat for wildlife, it is critical that we have adequate regulations to protect vernal ponds and their surrounding habitat. ■

Meredith Holgerson received her PhD from Yale University's School of Forestry and Environmental Studies in 2016, where she studied vernal ponds in Connecticut. Her research focused on pond food-web structure and biogeochemistry, including how inputs of forest leaf litter affect pond ecosystems. She is now a Smith Conservation Research Fellow based in Portland, OR, where she studies floodplain wetlands.



A spotted turtle visiting a vernal pond in the spring.



Spotted salamander during "the big night" of spring migration.



A wood frog migrates across a snowy roadside en route to a vernal pond to breed.

## Poets' Corner



### BEACON HILL ON SUNDAY

by Jen Payne

Mourning Cloak escort  
through spring woods finds  
Jays on high alert and  
a pair of Wild Turkeys  
in vocal discourse.  
No less than eight  
Ospreys swoop and swirl,  
with no regrets.  
Just one Egret.  
Two Vireo,  
in stereo:  
chartreuse!

Photo: Mourning Cloak butterfly at  
Beacon Hill Preserve, by Jen Payne.

## BECOME A TRACT STEWARD TODAY!

by Matt Radulski

Is there a Branford Land Trust property that you particularly enjoy visiting? Do you live near a BLT property or have you donated toward the acquisition of a certain property and gained a special feeling for it? Those are just a few of the motivations that spur on the efforts of BLT Tract Stewards.

And there's a deeper reason to become a Tract Steward right now: to aid the BLT in earning accreditation through the Land Trust Alliance. As you read in Pete Raymond's letter on page 2, LTA accreditation is a mark of distinction, showing that a land trust meets high standards for land conservation. Accreditation is a catalyst for improvement, which results in faster, better, and stronger conservation from individual land trusts and from America's land conservation movement.

For the BLT, building a strong corps of Tract Stewards aids and protects not only the property that you steward, but all of the properties protected by the organization. It can even put Branford's Land Trust higher on the priority list for grants from such organizations as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

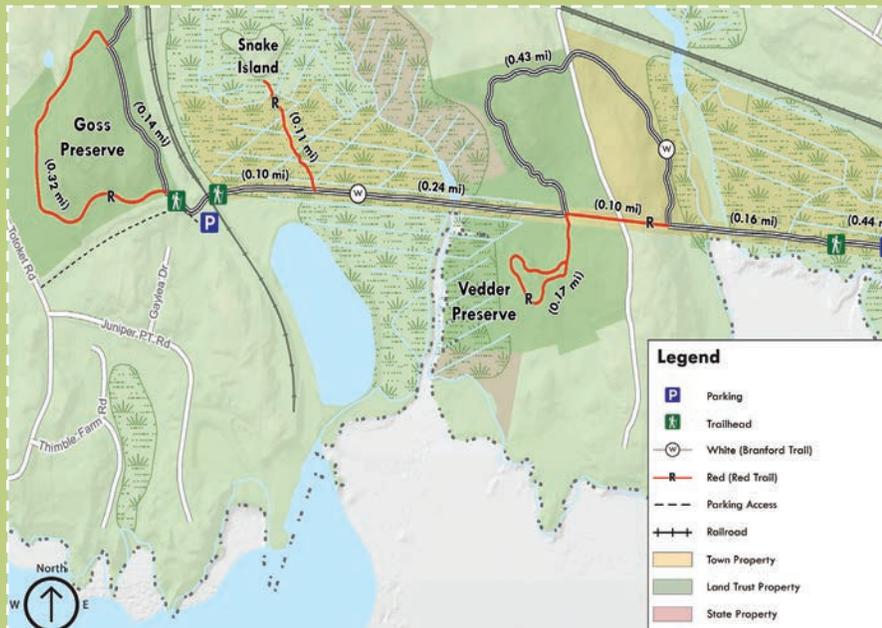
The BLT's corps of Tract Stewards volunteers its time to help the Trust fulfill its responsibilities for the protection and maintenance of the land that it holds in an organized and ongoing way. Tract Stewards are the BLT's eyes and ears, ambassadors of vital importance. They are crucial in helping us manage and protect the land entrusted to the BLT for the public's enjoyment and the preservation of wild areas.

What would you do as a Tract Steward? The main responsibilities of a Tract Steward are monitoring his or her Stewardship property and notifying the BLT if anything seems amiss – if dumping seems to have taken place, if the tract or its trails need maintenance or cleanup, or anything else occurs which could threaten the land or appropriate access to the tract by the public. The BLT will organize whatever actions are needed.

Stand up for your favorite BLT property, and work to preserve it! If you don't have a favorite property, discover one—a list of the tracts available for your review.

Details on how to be a Tract Steward are on the BLT website under PROTECT, or, if you prefer, call Matt Radulski at 203-627-1063 to get Stewardship details and find out which tracts are available. ■

# Take a Walk in Branford...



## THE TROLLEY TRAIL, GOSS & VEDDER PRESERVES

Throughout the first half of the 20th century, the trolley was a dominant form of transportation along the shoreline. As the automobile gained dominance after World War II, the trolley was discontinued, but in many places the physical rail bed remained. In the early 1970s, BLT volunteer David Anderson conceived the idea of a trail through the salt marsh and oversaw its construction with help from Boy Scout Troop 422 and the New Haven Trap Rock Co. (now Tilcon). The Trolley Trail has long been a favorite among residents, offering an intimate view of the tidal wetlands and a chance to observe osprey nesting on one of the many platforms established by the BLT.

The Trolley Trail is complemented by the Goss Preserve in Pine Orchard and the Vedder Preserve along Pleasant Point Road. The 15-acre wooded Goss Preserve was donated to the BLT by Nancy B. Goss, a longtime Pine Orchard resident. A short trail with gentle ups and downs encircles the property.

The 27-acre Vedder Preserve was donated in 1980. No one should miss the climb to the Vedder monument, with its remarkable views of Long Island Sound, the salt marsh, the Trolley Trail, and the Thimble Islands. There, a plaque tells the moving story of the donor, Jennie Vedder.

Vedder grew up in Pleasant Point, where her father earned a modest living building and repairing boats. Jennie taught school in Branford and then moved to Greenwich Village, where she worked for the American News Company and attended night school at New York University. She made frequent weekend trips back to Branford, never losing her love of the place where she grew up. Whenever a piece of land on Pleasant Point came up for sale, she found a way to buy it, once even borrowing from her boss to do so. In 1963, Vedder retired and moved back to Branford, where her closest relatives were surprised to learn that she harbored a secret love for writing poetry. Vedder could have sold all of the land she accumulated and lived a lavish life, but instead she chose a lifestyle similar to her modest upbringing. In 1980, she deeded 27 acres, nearly all she had accumulated, to the BLT. She died in 1981 at age 90. A book of her poetry is available at both Branford libraries. ■

## REMEMBERING

The Branford Land Trust remembers BETTY ANN (SLINEY) TRAPASSO, a longtime member who donated two parcels of tidal marsh along the Branford River in 1993 and a wooded parcel of land in 2010 in honor of her family, and ERSKINE CROSSLEY, a former board member and co-chair of our Property Management Committee.

We were honored to receive substantial bequests from the estates of LILLIAN STAMLER and PRISCILLA OLIVER. Lillian was a longtime resident of Stony Creek and a Lifetime member of the Land Trust. Priscilla resided in Short Beach. She was a member of the Land Trust and the Branford Historical Society.

Text from *Take a Walk in Branford*, the Branford Land Trust Trail Guide. Map courtesy of South Central Regional Council of Governments (SCRCOG), scrcog.org. NOTE: some BLT property boundaries appear incorrectly on this map due to Town GIS data inaccuracies.



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*Take a walk in Branford...  
at the popular Trolley  
Trail. Read more on page 7.*

(Photo by Donna Doherty)



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NEED  
YOU!**

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**SIGN ME UP!**

- Board of Directors/Leadership
- Community Outreach & Education
- Hands-on Environmental Day Camp
- Membership
- Nature Explorer Program
- Publicity & Website
- Secretarial/Administrative
- Tract Stewards
- Trails & Work Parties

Special Interests or Skills .....

.....

.....

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