



# BRANFORD LAND TRUST

DECEMBER 2017 • VOL. 27, NO. 3

*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.*

## MANY HANDS MAKE LIGHT WORK

From its beginning 50 years ago, the Branford Land Trust has been an active, all-volunteer organization. We have successfully relied on you, our members, for your time as well as your donations. Without active volunteers, members and contributions, the BLT would not have been able to thrive. It is my assertion that a supported and thriving land trust leads to a more attractive town and a better community. We at the BLT would like to deeply thank you, and all of our volunteers and members, for helping both our organization and our community prosper.

Over the past couple of years alone, our membership has grown to over 500 households, including 100 new members in the past year. What a great sign for Branford and our shoreline communities! A strong membership is a clear indication of the value given to open space and the environment.

We have also seen an uptick in volunteering that includes a very active Trails Committee. This group has completed an outstanding bog walk in our new Red Hill Woods parcel and continues to keep our trails welcoming for visitors. They have recently worked with volunteers from Denali, Walmart and Forma Therapeutic to help improve our town's trails, and coordinate their efforts with our monthly Property Management work parties. Complementing their efforts, the BLT is actively growing its Stewardship Program to oversee the 1,000 acres of open space we currently manage in town.

Behind that visible frontline of activity, we have a collection of enthusiastic volunteers who coordinate our hikes and lectures, arrange programs in the local schools, oversee our finances and records, manage our publicity and outreach efforts, and regularly support the ongoing workings of this active and viable organization.

Please consider making a donation to our efforts. We have enclosed a return envelope for your convenience. With your support, the Branford Land Trust looks forward to continuing our work on behalf of our members and our town in 2018, and for the next 50 years!

Peter Raymond, President

*Fall at Van Wie Field  
(Photo by Jen Payne)*





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# BLT RECEIVES WALMART GRANT

by Gunther (Bud) Dannheim

In July, a representative of Walmart wrote the Branford Land Trust (BLT) to inquire about a community volunteer opportunity for a group of Walmart workers. The director of the Trail Maintenance Committee, Matt Reed, suggested a group of tasks at various BLT tracts, such as clearing trails and removing invasive plants harmful to the local ecosystem. In early August, a team of eleven Walmart employees tackled the southeast corner of the Van Wie field, removing brush, fallen branches, and invasive multi-flora rose.

During this event, a Walmart volunteer informed us that Walmart offered community grants and suggested that BLT apply.

Concurrently, a Branford Eagle Scout had volunteered to construct and install an information kiosk at the Red Hill Woods trail complex (see page 7). With volunteer labor and some assistance from local building material businesses, the cost for the kiosk was under \$500.

Maps of surrounding trails, points of interest and detailed walking directions for the trails have been posted in the kiosk.

The Property Management Committee explored the need for additional kiosks at several other BLT trail locations and agreed that the Walmart Community Grant Program offered an opportunity to fund the material.

In October, the BLT was notified that its grant application was approved for \$1,000. We are grateful to Walmart for this grant, as the funds can now be allocated to the construction and installation of more trail information kiosks. ■



*Branford Walmart manager Alex Carlisle presents BLT president Peter Raymond with a check for \$1,000.*



The Branford Land Trust NEWS is mailed to all Land Trust members. It is produced by Words by Jen, Branford, and printed with soy ink on FSC Certified paper with 50% post-consumer content.

## UPCOMING EVENTS



*Winter Solitude, acrylic, 16 x 20, Jay Babina (Branford)*

### BLT's 50th Anniversary Art Show

**Friday, December 8, 5-8pm**

A variety of local artists will participate in the 50th Anniversary Art Show celebrating the work and achievements of the organization. The show takes place at the Land Trust House, 26 School Street in Stony Creek. The theme is open spaces, and works by a wide range of local artists will reflect our mission to preserve open space in Branford, and to promote our community's appreciation of Branford's diverse natural features.

### New Year's Day Hike

**Sunday, January 1, 1pm**

Start off the New Year on the right foot! Come out for a hike with the BLT! This year, we'll explore the Saltonstall Mountain Preserve, part of a steep traprock ridge that reaches from west to east, straddling the Branford/North Branford border. Enjoy this 2+ mile hike, led by Bill Horne and Matt Reed, through stunning habitat with expansive views from some of the highest points in Branford. We'll meet at the Lantern View Drive at 1pm. (Follow Mill Plain Road to Twin Lakes Road, left onto Twin Lakes, left onto Summit Drive, right onto Lantern View Drive. Park at the end.) Expect moderate terrain, some sloping trails and steep inclines, rocky underfooting. Parents should be prepared to carry younger children if they get tired. Please wear appropriate dress and comfortable, supportive walking shoes. Bring water. Walking sticks welcome. Weather may change our plans, watch our website and Facebook pages for details.

### Lecture Series

This year's Winter/Spring Lecture Series will be held in the Totoket Room at the Canoe Brook Senior Center, 11 Cherry Hill Road. Save the dates!

**January 30, 7pm**

**February 27, 7pm**

**March 27, 7pm**

**April 24, 7pm**

Watch for details on our website, Facebook page and winter postcard (coming soon)!

### Animal Tracking Classes

**January 18**

**& February 25**

**Saturdays, 9:30 - 11am**

Learn to recognize animal footprints and other signs of their passage through the woods during these free Animal Tracking Classes, from 9:30-11am on Saturday, January 18 and February 25, 2018. The classes will be led by Tom Cleveland and Chris Woerner at the Lake Saltonstall preserve. We'll hope for snow, but it will be fun even without it!

Meet at the Regional Water Authority parking lot on the north side of Hosely Avenue, 0.3 miles from Brushy Plain Road. Expect moderate terrain, some sloping trails and inclines, rocky underfooting. Parents should be prepared to carry younger

children if they get tired. Please wear appropriate dress and comfortable, supportive walking shoes. Bring water. Walking sticks welcome. Watch our Facebook page for possible schedule changes. For details, call Tom Cleveland, 203-981-9040.

### Work Parties

Call Bill Horne, [billhorne48@yahoo.com](mailto:billhorne48@yahoo.com), for details.

### December 2 STONY CREEK PARTNERSHIP FIELD

**Saturday, 9am**

We return to the Partnership field to continue clearing woody shrubs and trees. Meet at 9am. Bring loppers, small handsaws, sturdy hand clippers, and work gloves. Park on Long Point Road or Wallace Road. We will walk in along the private road that goes off to the right just as Wallace Road starts to climb the hill. Take the first driveway on the left and look for some stepping stones going up the hill on the right side of the driveway with a BLT signpost at the top. Follow the red blazes to the field, bearing left at the point where the trail splits.

**2018 DATES:** January 20, February 17, March 10, April 7, April 21 - Town and Branford River Clean-up Day, May 19, and June 16 - Branford Festival.

# REMEMBERING ALICE VAN WIE



**A**lice Doughan Van Wie died September 30, 2017. She, her late husband William (Bill) Van Wie, and his parents Raymond and Rose Nelson Van Wie left a huge legacy to Branford by gifting more than 100 acres of woodland, wetland, brooks, a field, and a pond off Red Hill Road over their lifetimes to the Branford Land Trust. These acres about the 406-acre Town Quarry property and, with the BLT's new 29-acre Red Hill Woods, provide close to 550 acres of protected open space with scenic, blazed trails for the enjoyment of Branford's townspeople, and habitat for wild bird and animal species.

Ray Van Wie acquired parcels of land from the 1920s through the 1940s when the area was primarily rural. To do this, he worked hard at several jobs, among them pharmacist, photographer and MIF laborer and watchman. In the '70s, he donated much of the

land to the fledgling Branford Land Trust in his wife's memory, setting an example for like-minded people to follow in subsequent years. Bill Van Wie inherited his father's love for the land and after building their house on Red Hill Road, he and Alice continued to donate tracts of open space to the Trust. Sometime after Bill died in 2007, Alice made a further donation of a cottage as well as its surrounding land and pond frontage, to the Land Trust.

Alice and Bill were both career social workers and active community supporters. They were at the center of Land Trust activities and events, and Alice supported all of Bill's efforts as he was chairman of the Trust's Acquisition committee and subsequently the Land Management committee, which established and organized the maintenance programs of the Trust's many properties. The Van Wie family provided such generosity in the giving of their land and offering guidance to the Branford Land Trust over the years, and we are most grateful for their legacy.

Alice, Bill, and his parents are remembered and celebrated each year on our annual pre-Thanksgiving walk held on the property. ■

# Our Coyote Population

by Julia D. Monk, BLT Guest Writer



If it seems like coyotes are on the rise in your area, it's probably because they are. Among the most adaptable of North America's predators, coyotes have been expanding eastward from their historic range in the western United States and Canada. Here's some need-to-know information about living safely with your new neighbors.

## ABOUT COYOTES

Coyotes (*Canis latrans*) are wild canids closely related to dogs and wolves. Coyotes live in family groups, with a male and female jointly caring for 1-12 pups. You may hear family members calling to each other at dawn and dusk with a variety of different vocalizations—some of which can sound eerily like human cries. These extraordinarily adaptable animals are found in most habitats throughout North America, and as omnivores, they eat a wide range of foods, from insects and berries to rabbits and deer. While they are capable of killing large prey like deer (often hunting in pairs), coyotes more often scavenge roadkill and other carcasses. Coyotes may also scavenge food items from garbage near towns and cities—which allows them to successfully live near human settlements, but also brings them into more conflict with humans.

Coyotes have not always been present in eastern forests. In fact, recent research has shown that the coyote's rapid eastward expansion may be the result of hybridization with wolves. Eastern coyotes are not, it turns out, pure coyote: instead, they contain a mixture of coyote and wolf DNA, a relic of interbreeding with the wolf populations around the Great Lakes. As a result, eastern coyotes are larger (weighing roughly 30-50 lbs) and stronger than their western counterparts and are better at hunting large prey such as white-tailed deer – which may explain much of their success in the deer-ridden Northeast.

Genetic mixing with wolves and domestic dogs is also responsible for eastern coyotes' colorful coats: while western coyotes are mostly grey-brown, our local coyotes can also be dark brown, blonde, or red-blonde. So don't confuse them with German Shepherds, although their coloring can be similar: eastern coyotes can be identified by their slim noses, yellow eyes, and bushy tails which hang low to the ground and often have black tips.

### BENEFITS OF COYOTES

As the most common large predators in the Northeast, coyotes may play an important role in regulating the pest species they prey upon. White-tailed deer are a growing problem in Connecticut and other parts of New England, as their rising populations destroy vegetation, cause vehicle collisions, and carry the ticks that spread Lyme disease. Coyote predation supplements hunting and pest management programs to help keep deer populations at manageable levels. This regulatory effect is not only due to direct predation by coyotes. Research has shown that the mere presence of coyotes on the landscape makes deer more stressed, and as a result of that stress deer birth rates decrease.

Coyotes may also help protect vulnerable bird species. In California, the loss of coyotes in fragmented habitats led to an increase in smaller carnivores like foxes and raccoons via a phenomenon known as "mesopredator release." When unchecked by top predators, these smaller predators decimated rare bird populations in the region.

Whether coyotes should be culled as pests or embraced as deer controls remains a contentious debate among wildlife managers in the Northeast. In reality, culling coyotes is rarely effective, and can even increase their population growth rate, as coyotes reproduce more readily at lower densities. While stakeholders determine the possibility and desirability of coyote population management, it may be best to learn to live alongside coyotes and develop the tools to mitigate coyote-human conflict as the northeastern coyote population grows. ■



## Coyote Precautions 101

*Coyote attacks on adult humans are rare – the chances of being attacked by a domestic dog are far higher. Nevertheless, the risk of conflict with coyotes does exist and is likely to grow along with their presence in suburban and urban areas. Luckily, there are some basic precautions you can take that can drastically reduce the chance of conflict with coyotes:*

### Never, ever feed coyotes.

Most bites occur when people are attempting to feed the animals – and moreover, receiving food reduces coyotes' fear of humans, which can make them more bold and more likely to approach people.



### Never let your pets or your toddlers outside alone.

Coyotes present a greater threat to pets and small children, so never let either your pets or your toddlers outside alone.

Coyotes can present a threat to small livestock such as sheep and chickens. Well-maintained fences and guard dogs have both proven effective at reducing coyote depredation of livestock.

**Don't leave food or garbage uncovered outside** – this may attract coyotes to your home.



### Make loud noises.

If you do encounter a coyote in your yard or while out walking or hiking, wave your arms, make loud noises, and throw sticks and stones. The coyote will likely back off immediately if you seem at all aggressive.

*Julia Monk is a Ph.D. student at Yale University's School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. Her research focuses on the roles of predators and scavengers in driving ecosystem processes, and she is currently studying mountain lion effects on carbon and nutrient cycling in the Argentine Andes.*

# PUMPING IRON AT SYBIL CREEK

Photos & Essay by Jonathan Katz

**H**urricane Irene flooded the Sybil Creek marshes and washed away a couple of steel dumpsters with plastic lids. They floated across the marsh and came to rest at the edge of one of BLT's Sybil Creek holdings. There they sat, abandoned by their rightful owner, who was apparently uninterested in the expensive and difficult exercise of transporting them back across the marsh from whence they'd come. Time passed. A lot of time.

Last winter, some BLT zealots armed with cutting torches kayaked out to the site of these abandoned containers and cut them up into bite-sized pieces, weighing anywhere from 30 to 150 pounds. They left these in place, since it was impractical to kayak them back to the shore. There they sat, and there they rusted.

In October, a small handful of BLT woodsmen gathered to chop invasive plants out of the Land Trust's Lower Sybil Creek property, a spit of upland to the east of Bruce & Johnson's Marina on Block Island Road. I joined them, because I live near there and wanted to take a look around. They gave me a pair of "loppers" but I am not good at recognizing invasive plants, and I'm not wild about killing things so mostly I carried them to



look busy. I walked around, picked up a couple of old beer bottles, and enjoyed the morning sun.

Then somebody remembered the big pile of old rusting iron at the base of the marsh, and someone else got the bright idea to carry these pieces 200 yards or so up the embankment and through the woods to the edge of the marina, where they could be collected and trucked away.

And so the great Land Trust metal-lift of 2017 began. Working alone, or in pairs, or, for a couple of the biggest pieces, six-on-one, the intrepid work party regulars and I began to haul the wreckage out of the woods. From the swampy edge of the marsh, up the



embankment, down one of the rough trails, over brambles and roots, to the hard right turn next to the two fallen logs, up the trail, down the trail, over the spectacular tripping hazard and to the pile we huffed and puffed and lifted and carried and strained.

The largest piece was a jagged, five-sided chunk reinforced with steel girder. Six of us rolled it slowly uphill, manhandling it around trees, then turned it flat and carried it like a stretcher, with people periodically letting go when the trail grew too narrow to permit a gang of six to all hold on at the same time. Next time we would appreciate the blowtorch crazies leaving us smaller pieces.

Heavy work gloves were essential, or we would have cut our hands to shreds and gotten tetanus. Beyond that, we used no tools, just arms and legs and backs and a shared desire to get it done. We estimate we hauled out perhaps half a ton of metal, and stacked it in a pile. Not a bad morning's work, for what could be delicately described as an older crowd. And when it was over, some of us posed for victory photos.

All Branford Land Trust work parties are open to all, and admission is free! ■



# OUR COMMUNITY LENDS A HAND

## Eagle Scout Kiosk Project at Red Hill Woods

In August the BLT was the grateful recipient of an information kiosk that will benefit and enhance the hiking pleasure of our community. The kiosk was donated through the efforts and generosity of Boy Scout Harrison Troidle and his family and friends, who designed, funded, constructed, and installed it at the head end of the trail leading to the Red Hill Woods.

In May, Harrison contacted the Land Trust to determine our interest in a kiosk to be located on any trail and of a design approved by BLT. This project, presented by Harrison to the Connecticut Yankee Council and the Troop 428 Review Committee, was part of a requirement for his advancement to the rank of Eagle Scout. He researched the design, determined the cost of materials, obtained required funding, and presented the project in June to the Land Trust Property Management Committee for final approval at the Red Hill Woods site. With many friends and family participating, the construction took place at his home and, when completed, the fully assembled kiosk was transported to the Red Hill Woods location and installed at the pre-selected site.

Maps of surrounding trails and the new trails and bog walk in Red Hill Woods have been posted in the kiosk. Also posted are points of interest and detailed walking directions for the trails. Thanks to Harrison Troidle, the BLT is pleased to offer this information kiosk as a resource for interesting and safe hiking on trails in and around the Red Hill Woods area. This kiosk will serve as an ideal template for future kiosks on other Land Trust trails in Branford.



## Walmart Pitches in at Van Wie Field

A great group of volunteers from Branford's Walmart joined a BLT work party in August, removing shrubs, fallen tree branches, and invasive muliflora rose and their roots from the southeast corner of the Van Wie Field. The use of a come-along puller was necessary in some cases to pull out the larger roots and stumps. Our goal is to clear the way for unimpeded mowing to the original edges of the field to keep the old field character and enhance biodiversity.



## Denali Team Clean Up Vedder

The staff from Denali and the BLT enjoyed teaming up with a few members of the community to kick off a clean-up series this fall. It took place at the Vedder property where the teams separated to clean up the parking areas, a few trails and an overlook before sunset. Close to 10 bags of trash and recyclables were hauled away.



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# WE 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

*Volunteer now to meet some really great people doing good work all around town!*

Special Interests or Skills .....

.....

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Mail to: Branford Land Trust, P.O. Box 254, Branford, CT 06405, or send your information via email us at [info@branfordlandtrust.org](mailto:info@branfordlandtrust.org).