Land Protection: Behind the Scenes

Land protection is at the core of the land trust mission. It involves countless stories of patience, perseverance and partnership. For one pending acquisition, the first discussion with owners took place more than a decade ago. Ten family members were involved in approval and there were countless interactions with surveyors, appraisers, neighbors and attorneys over the years before reaching this point. In other situations, land deals fall through unexpectedly, even after years of work and all funding is in place. It is long, hard work.

Yet the two maps on the right demonstrate how much has been accomplished by the commitment of Sakonnet region conservation partners since the year 2000. The green expanses represent protected properties in Tiverton and Little Compton. The larger named areas are open for public access. Many others remain private but are protected with conservation easements.

Tiverton Land Trust’s Land Protection Committee is the first stop for reviewing possible properties. Chaired by Trish Sylvester, the committee includes five current and former TLT presidents, representatives from the Tiverton Open Space Commission and The Nature Conservancy, as well as other interested board members and citizens. Each potential project is rated on a series of conservation values and

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President’s Message

Welcome to our summer newsletter—we have a lot of things going on that we’d like to report to our members. These include new properties/trails coming on line, a new board member, our continued efforts in support of forest continuity and land protection, and of course planning for our annual celebration, A Country Day at Pardon Gray.

We are close to opening our newest acquisition, Pocasset Ridge Conservation Area. As you will see from the map on page 1, it joins other properties we and our partners have protected toward a contiguous greenway along the upper spine of Tiverton, east of Main Road. This reinforces our efforts to prevent forest fragmentation. We continue work to negotiate acquisitions and easements that further these efforts, while at the same time raising funds to pay for the costs. By comparing the maps pre-2000 and 2017, you will see the impact our efforts have had (in conjunction with Tiverton Open Space, DEM, The Nature Conservancy and other partners) in protecting land in Tiverton. In these efforts, your continued financial support and easement donations are critical.

Helping with these efforts is our dedicated board and advisory committee. We are pleased to welcome new board member Gregory Jones. Greg is a long-time Tiverton resident with a history of community involvement, including his efforts helping revive the Tiverton Yacht Club clubhouse and the new home of the Tiverton Library.

Finally, please save the date for A Country Day at Pardon Gray, which will be held Saturday, September 23rd (rain date Sunday the 24th). We hope to see you there, if not before, on one of our other properties this summer. In the meantime, thank you for your continued support!

Eric Watne
President
In Short...

Construction on Pocasset Ridge Trails

Students from LEAF (Leaders in Environmental Action for the Future) from Conn. and NY joined students Brayton Keenan and Eddy Keenan of Little Compton to help construct ‘bridges’ through wetlands at Pocasset Ridge. The lumber had to be hauled in from the Main Rd. lot to sites about 0.4 miles onto the property. John Berg and Cheryl Wiitala from The Nature Conservancy joined Wayne Browning and Jim Spears for a full day of work under some very hot and humid conditions only made worse by lots of mosquitoes.

Volunteers Recognized at 2017 Community Forum

Professor Mark Bertness of Brown University presented “How Will Salt Marsh Die Off and Sea Level Rise Get Along?” at our Annual Meeting and Community Forum on April 23. Volunteer of the Year Awards were presented as well. Wayne Browning recognized Kim Herfert, who has managed the children’s activities at Pardon Gray Day for at least five years and is helpful with whatever is needed despite her many other responsibilities. Garry Plunkett presented the award to octogenarian Dana Sumner, who walks the trails every day and reports issues at Highland Woods and other properties.
Land Protection: Behind the Scenes

discussed with the board of directors at critical junctures. Surveys and appraisals are reviewed. Relationships with landowners and conservation partners are cultivated and reinforced. Grant proposals are written and other funding is sought. Legal documents are tailored for each transaction. Always, the process must adhere to Land Trust Alliance Standards and Practices, as well as IRS guidelines. Even though much is going on behind the scenes, confidentiality rules.

Recently, I was organizing old files and came across a 2001 conservation plan for Tiverton and Little Compton. The team of scientists who created the document identified priority conservation areas of wetlands and associated natural resources, mostly based on biological inventories. I was encouraged to see that nearly all Rank 1 and 2 sites have now been protected, along with several in Rank 3. More work is underway on at least four other properties in Tiverton—stay tuned.

~ Nancy Weinstein (thanks to John Berg and Kevin Ruddock at The Nature Conservancy for maps)

TLT Needs You!

Volunteer opportunities abound at the Tiverton Land Trust. Protecting and preserving our open space calls for a wide array of skills and if you have time to contribute, we can find a role for you to help us in our mission.

Board of Directors

The 10-year term limit for directors means that TLT is constantly in search of new leaders for board service. Board members play an instrumental role in the Trust’s continued growth and strength. If you are interested in learning more, please contact John Foley, chair of the Governance Committee, john@tivertonlandtrust.org.

Do you like the outdoors?

We need trail condition monitors. Every few weeks, grab a pair of hand shears and walk a trail. Trim back vines creeping across paths, remove any litter and report any large fallen limbs that require power tools to clear. It’s a great way for adults and kids to get exercise and help keep the trails in good condition.

If you see roadside litter along the length of Pardon Gray Preserve or at any of our other properties, it is a big help if you take time to pick it up. Or grab a garbage bag and walk along the road, collecting. Unfortunately, trash just keeps appearing—we can use any help we can get to keep our properties looking pristine.

Contact info@tivertonlandtrust.org if you can help with property management.

Help at Pardon Gray Day (September 23)

On Friday night, help is needed to set up the tent and organize for various activities on the fun-filled day. On Saturday, we need volunteers to cook, park cars, run the TLT tables, bake pies, set up kids’ games and keep everything organized and running smoothly.

Contact Kelly Levesque at 401-487-4878 or kellylevesque68@gmail.com if you can help at Pardon Gray Day.
Forest Fragmentation: An Accelerating Concern

Despite our moniker as the Ocean State, more than half of Rhode Island’s land area is forested. Roughly 75% of these woodlands are privately owned, and we are losing them at a frightening pace. Between 1998 and 2007, Rhode Island lost approximately 10,000 acres of forests. Development pressure is breaking up remaining woodlands into smaller, disconnected parcels with diminished value for drinking-water protection, flood control, wildlife habitat and recreation.

“Forest fragmentation is the biggest issue facing Rhode Island’s forests,” says Christopher Riely, forest supervisor for Providence Water and coordinator of the Rhode Island Woodland Partnership, a coalition of foresters, landowners and conservation professionals. This group has just issued a position paper with recommended action items on “Preventing the Loss of Rhode Island’s Forests.” (https://rhodeislandwoods.uri.edu/files/RIWP-PreventingLossForestland.pdf)

There are many reasons to preserve large forest parcels of continuous habitat. Significant forest blocks are more resilient to climate impacts, including weather-related events and invasive plants. In addition, such forests:

- Protect vital watersheds and surface water purity
- Control flooding
- Promote biodiversity by providing habitats for species sensitive to human presence or requiring large territories
- Mitigate the effects of climate change by storing carbon, moderating air temperature and improving air quality
- Support multiple recreational opportunities including a deep forest experience

The Pocasset Ridge conservation project in Tiverton is a chance to fight forest fragmentation in our own backyard. Pocasset Ridge is part of an unfragmented forest that extends over thousands of acres, by far the largest forest tract east of Narragansett Bay. Over a period of 15 years, a partnership between the Tiverton Land Trust, Tiverton Open Space Commission, The Nature Conservancy and DEM, along with scores of donors, has saved 500+ acres of this mature, continuous coastal forest (please see TLT’s Fall 2016 newsletter).

The Phase II vision focuses on acquiring additional parcels that will link Pocasset Ridge with the already protected tracts to the south, Pardon Gray Preserve and Weetamoo Woods. Many donors have helped bring the project to this stage—please join us to help achieve the next phase. If we are successful, we will help create a continuous, nearly pristine coastal oak-holly forest of 2,000 acres along the Sakonnet. Its position astride the Atlantic flyway and within sight of salt water magnifies its value to migratory songbirds and wildlife. For our densely populated South Coast, it will offer a unique environmental benefit and a wonderful respite from our busy lives.

Come visit and see our progress thus far. The first trails open in September 2017.
Please be generous in your support of the Tiverton Land Trust – as you have been in the past!

I took a walk in the woods and came out taller than the trees.
~ TLT volunteer Sean Griffin