



THE WESTERLY LAND TRUST
2015 Membership Dues and Annual Fund
 PO Box 601, Westerly, RI 02891-0601

Please make your check payable to **The Westerly Land Trust** and return with this slip. **THANK YOU!**

I am/We are interested in volunteering for:

- Outdoor work Office work
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Name: _____

Address: _____

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Please initiate / renew my / our membership at the following level:

- Individual \$30 Family \$50
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I/We want to become a major supporter; we enclose \$ _____.

- Conservationist \$100-\$249
 Protector \$250-\$499
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 President's Circle \$1000 and over
 (Complimentary membership included.)

A NEW DELICIOUS WAY TO SUPPORT THE LAND TRUST



Game Dinner Fundraiser: April 26 at 4 p.m.

What better way to celebrate Earth Day than at the Land Trust inaugural "Foraged of the Earth" dinner fundraiser, enjoying wonderful cuisine in the beautiful old Industrial Trust bank? Several courses crafted by featured chef Chris Champagne of 84 Tavern on Canal will highlight edibles foraged from the wild, including local shellfish, venison, mushrooms and greens. Courses will be complemented with beverage pairings from Jonathan Edwards Winery and Grey Sail Brewing of Rhode Island. Forager Keith Cowley will provide insight about the sourcing of ingredients and the earth's spring bounty.

Funds raised by the dinner will directly benefit our land conservation program that preserves Westerly's wildlife habitats, drinking water supply, local and public recreation areas.

Tickets are \$50 and can be purchased on our website or at the office, but get them soon – only 50 will be available. Due to the nature of this event, we are unable to accommodate dietary restrictions and the dinner is not suitable for children.

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 United Theatre Executive Director, Simon Holt
 Newsletter Editors, Leslie Ahern Brown
 and Deborah Stewart
 Garden Coordinator, Keith Cowley

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A Sense of Place

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE WESTERLY LAND TRUST

IN THE BEGINNING THERE WAS CYNTHIA

Every good story has a compelling main character—a hero, if you will—that drives the action. But while many fictional heroes carry guns, solve crimes or save the world, our real-life hero needed only a clear vision, a ready wit and infinite patience to make remarkable things happen right here in Westerly. She is Cynthia Lafferty, the founding president of the Westerly Land Trust. Quite simply, without her the Land Trust would not exist.

Cynthia moved to Westerly from Darien, Conn., where development was—and is still—rampant. She remembers driving down Shore Road between stands of tall trees near what is now the Dr. John Champlin Glacier Park Preserve, “and I’d say to myself, ‘This has got to be preserved.’ ”

Thus spurred to action, she conceived the idea of a local land trust. She found inspiration in the success of groups such as the Block Island Conservancy and looked at their histories for guidance.

Cynthia set about recruiting like-minded individuals. She made a cold call to Harvey Perry, and they agreed to meet. When she arrived at his house and he opened the door, she saw “this young whippersnapper with a bowtie” and thought, “He’s just the ticket!”

And so it began. The Land Trust’s first board of directors included—besides Cynthia and Harvey—Jon Eckel, Ted Goodchild, David Panciera, Clement Griscom and Cal Groton. The new entity became certified as a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization in 1987.

The group worked for a decade out of each other’s living rooms pursuing various land acquisition projects, but none came to fruition until 1998, when Dick Holliday and Bill McKendree approached the Land Trust for help in preserving the former Chapman farm in Avondale. The scenic property was on its way to becoming a housing development. But the developer went bankrupt, and there was an opportunity to purchase the land.

The rest, as they say, is history. Avondale Farm Preserve became the Land Trust’s first—and most intensively used—property. Today, the Land Trust has 22 preserves, comprising 1,600 acres, and dozens of dedicated volunteers who are carrying on the work that Cynthia Lafferty began.

In 2013 Cynthia and her husband Jack moved to Newport, where they are restoring a beautiful 1884 Victorian cottage. While she is still a Land Trust member, Cynthia has turned her attention to the National Society of Colonial Dames—serving as its vice president—and ringing hand bells at a local church. And she and Jack spend a lot of time at the Redwood Library in Newport, the oldest lending library in the country.

While she now busies herself in her new home across Narragansett Bay, her heart will always be here in Westerly—right in the middle of our preserves.



PRESERVES CAN BE REAL-WORLD LABS FOR STUDENTS

The Land Trust has launched an environmental education initiative in collaboration with local organizations and educators in an effort to understand the barriers and benefits of using the natural world to supplement textbook and classroom-based learning.

The Rhode Island Environmental Literacy Plan, released in 2011, concludes that Rhode Island students are not academically competitive with their peers. The report, by the state Environmental Education Association, in collaboration with the state Department of Education, lays out a strategy to integrate critical environmental and science learning into the curricula to inspire the next generation of stewards of our land.

The Land Trust has been awarded a grant to promote outdoor classroom opportunities to support the implementation of the RIELP in our community. Our preserves offer environments where educators can immerse students in field-based, hands-on experiences. However, it is important to first understand the barriers to incorporating outdoor class time by establishing and sustaining partnerships between educators and environmental organizations.

Last summer the Land Trust held a focus group meeting to initiate the conversation. We aim to build momentum this spring with the formation of the Westerly Environmental Literacy Council, the objective of which will be to understand how state standards can be aided by using the natural environment as a real-world laboratory for science instruction.



MILESTONES



Warmer days have arrived and the snows have melted away at last. I must admit the snow cover was ideal for snowshoeing expeditions, and I even had the

chance to enjoy one myself. It is amazing how the appearance and character of our open space lands transform with the seasons, revealing sights, sounds and sensations that are unique to each.

With the blanket of snow gone, the trails are now wet and muddy paths that lead me past rushing streams and vernal pools that yield springtime life. Finally, the salamanders and frogs have emerged and I can hear the wood frogs quacking in the swamp. Before long the spring peepers will be a loud chorus in the treetops. Wood ducks and owls are nesting, getting ready to raise new broods. The natural world that has been seemingly asleep is again teeming with life.

I invite you to venture out into the fields and forests and the soggy river shore to visit the many lands that your support has enabled us to protect. Thanks to each and every one of our members and donors, these places are here to provide habitat for wildlife, to protect our precious water, and for you to visit so that you and yours may appreciate their priceless value and beauty.

You will find our list of supporters enclosed in this newsletter issue. Look for your name and the names of people you know. Then give them a call and go for a hike together at one of our preserves to see what your support has helped us accomplish.

Breathe in the fresh air, listen to the birds sing and know that you have done something wonderful. Thank you from all of us at the Westerly Land Trust.

Happy spring!

Field Notes

BUILD A BETTER BIRDHOUSE

After the winter we have just endured, it is not hard to imagine the plight of animals in the wild. Therefore, as we gingerly approach spring, think about helping the creatures of the air in their native habitat by placing bird boxes, aka birdhouses, in your backyard.

Not every species will use a birdhouse, but those who seek refuge in the cavities of trees and fence posts can be persuaded. They include purple martins, whose houses resemble a condo.

Above all, the size and shape and entrance hole are the most important design points to consider. For example, the entrance hole for a house wren, at 1 1/8 inches, will be smaller than one for a bluebird at 1 1/2 inches. Keeping the entrance as small as possible for whatever species has the advantage of preventing predators from gaining entrance. Some suggest securing a piece of sheet metal the same diameter as the entrance hole to keep the entryway secure.

Most bird sites recommend making the birdhouse out of untreated wood such as pine, cedar or fir and affixing sides with weatherproof screws. Obviously, making sure the house is securely fastened to either the tree or pole is very important. The inside walls should be at least 3/4-inch thick for good insulation and they should be rough to enable the babies to easily crawl out.

A sloped roof that reaches five inches beyond the front entrance is important for deflecting rain as well as predators.

Do not include perches, which are not necessary for the birds and might create easy access for predators.

Include a hinged door or other easy access point so you are able to clean and maintain the bird box. It is wise to clean it at least once a year in, say, mid-August with one part bleach to nine parts water.

Put the birdhouse outside before the start of the breeding season so the birds targeted can find and access the box. In our area, mid to late March is ideal. Avoid placement anywhere near where pesticides are used so the birds are in no danger of contamination.

Allow for 1/4 acre per birdhouse. Put them high enough so squirrels and cats cannot jump from the ground to the top of the birdhouse. Avoid placing them near piles of brush since snakes are good climbers!

If you are really ambitious, consider installing a nest camera before the season so you can enjoy each and every moment of the new lives created in the structure. Helpful websites include allaboutbirds.org from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and nestwatch.org.

A Little Help From Our Friends

As part of her Girl Scout Silver Award project, Grace Bueno from Troop 119 in Ashaway has built four sturdy owl nesting boxes for the Land Trust. In preparation, she gathered information about barred owls and eastern screech owls, their nesting requirements and best practices for constructing and installing nest boxes for the two species. Land Trust volunteers hung the barred owl boxes and one screech owl box in Wahaneeta Preserve – how fitting to have these Girl Scout-created shelters in what was once a scout camp!

The tiny screech owl requires a 75-acre territory, about the size of Wahaneeta, so the second box for this species will be hung at another Land Trust property.

Thank you, Grace, for making a difference and helping local wildlife!

Westerly High School's Julia Wicklund partnered with us for her senior project for which she extensively researched invasive plant species found on various Land Trust preserves to help develop strategies for eradicating them and create a website about invasive plants. Julia organized a work crew of close to 20 volunteers in October to remove an unruly stand of burning bush from the streamside of Wildwood Preserve.

Julia's group and a follow-up Land Trust work crew in December were successful in getting the job done. With this invasive species removed, the Land Trust can now maintain the area to encourage the growth of native plants that will further improve the forest's health and benefit local wildlife.

Thank you to Julia and all of the volunteers who assisted. Check out her website at <http://juliawicklund11.wix.com/invasivecontrol>.



Grace Bueno and her nesting box.



You may have noticed our volunteers cleaning up the stone walls and overgrowth at Winnapaug Farm Preserve recently. With the arrival of spring, you will see increased Land Trust presence there. We plan to improve the habitats on the site and you may even see an event or two there later this year.

TELLING OUR STORY

Everyone loves a good story. To help the Westerly Land Trust share ours with the community, local filmmaker Chris Walsh has been working with us to create an engaging video of our many preserves. The full 10-minute video debuted at the Black & White Masquerade Ball and features spectacular footage of our preserves taken with a drone, with cameras on the ground and still photos as well. We will be sharing snippets from the video on our Facebook page and website in the coming months. Thank you to Chris for capturing the spirit of conservation so beautifully through the imagery in the video and to Board President Sheila Beattie for spearheading the project.

BLACK & WHITE MASQUERADE BALL

On February 21st the Ocean House was transformed into an enchanted forest for the Black & White Masquerade Ball to benefit the Westerly Land Trust. About 350 guests attended and \$60,000 was raised for the long-term care of our conservation lands. Thank you to the Ocean House and all who purchased tickets or volunteered at the event. It was a sweet success!



The Ice Queen greets Tony Green.



Stacey Jackson and Pam Sawyer undercover.

Guided Hikes

Crandall Family Preserve, Westerly

April 23

Francis C. Carter Memorial Preserve, Charlestown

April 30

Fisherville Brook, Exeter

May 7

Weekapaug Beach – Weekapaug

May 21

Veterans Cemetery, Exeter

Sunday, May 24

Big River Management Area, West Greenwich

June 4

Paddles start

June 18

Hikes are Thursdays at 10 am unless noted; details are available at www.westerlylandtrust.org. In state management areas everyone is required to wear 200 square inches of solid daylight fluorescent orange from the last Thursday in April to the last day in May.

Events Calendar

Introduction to Geocaching

April 25, 1 – 3:30 pm

Bring your GPS along for a real-world treasure hunt at Wahaneeta Preserve that is fun for the whole family. Sally Hanson will give an introductory presentation in the cabin and then lead the group on a geocaching hike combining fun technology with outdoor exploration. Registration is recommended; call 401-348-9109 or email sally.hanson@verizon.net. The program is free but donations are welcome.

Full Flower Moon Hike

May 3, 7:30 pm

Celebrate the arrival of spring as we hike through the moonlit Whiteley Preserve and learn about its ecosystem and wildlife. Naturalist Keith Cowley will lead the group on this nighttime exploration. Registration is suggested; call 401-315-2610 or email keith@newnativefoundation.org

Pawcatuck River Clean-Up

May 9, 8:30 am – 2:30 pm

Join us for a day on the river and help the Westerly Land Trust improve our local waterways. Volunteers in kayaks and canoes will conduct a clean-up from Bradford to Potter Hill as we combine fun paddling with regular stops to collect trash and debris along the way. Contact Sally Hanson at 401-348-9109 or sally.hanson@verizon.net to register.

Spring Foraging Hike

May 9, 9 – 11 am

Naturalist Keith Cowley will guide participants through Dr. John Champlin Glacier Park Preserve, identifying various woodland edibles found in the surrounding environment. This program is appropriate for beginners but is not recommended for children. Hilly terrain may be moderately challenging. Registration is required by emailing keith@newnativefoundation.org.

Wildlife and Glacial Geology Hike

June 21, 9 am

Explore the trails at Dr. John Champlin Glacier Park Preserve and learn about its diverse wildlife and interesting geologic history. Naturalist Keith Cowley will lead this family-friendly walk over hilly forested terrain. Meet at Tom Harvey Road entrance. No registration necessary.

Green Reading Group

June 23, 6 pm

Join the Land Trust book club, hosted by librarian Heather Field at the Land Trust building 10 High S. to discuss *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs the Climate* by Naomi Klein.

Visit our events calendar online at www.westerlylandtrust.org