



gosa news

Groton Open Space Association News, Fall 2016, Volume 5, No. 2

Protecting the Wild



Where the Wild Things Are: Fabulous Beasts of Long Island Sound By Syma Ebbin [pp. 9-12](#)

Lair of the Sea Serpent, Elihu Vedder (American, New York 1836–1923 Rome), ca. 1899, Oil on canvas, Gift of Mrs. Harold G. Henderson, 1976, Metropolitan Museum of Art



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A Letter from the President, Joan Smith

Dear GOSA members and friends,

As 2016 draws to a close, we have a lot to celebrate at the Groton Open Space Association. In cooperation with the State of Connecticut, we are fast closing in on the protection of a magnificent 201-acre property with a rare 44-acre pitch pine ridge, located in central Groton. The state will acquire the property for \$785,000 and GOSA will raise 15% of the purchase price, or \$117,750. Hopefully the purchase will be completed by the end of the year, and GOSA will then take up some of the stewardship responsibilities of the property: improving and maintaining trails, managing habitat in collaboration with the state, and educating the public about the rare and wonderful habitats this property contains. It will be a keystone in the north-south Groton greenbelt.

After finalizing the purchase of Avery Farm Nature Preserve last December, we had quite an active summer working with dozens of wonderful volunteers, including board members, who came out to improve and blaze trails on this beautiful property and to attack invasive plants that have taken over sections of it. Avery Farm is open to the public and we invite you to explore its diverse and scenic areas. In fact, we hosted work parties, as we call them, on all of our properties this past summer. We thank church, Navy, Pfizer and UConn groups for their wonderful assistance in stewardship during a very hot time this summer! (See *Sidney's Corner* for more)

These volunteers made possible the completion of a three-year, \$100,000 USDA/National Fish and Wildlife Service/CT DEEP-funded project to restore New England cottontail habitat at Avery Farm and Candlewood Ridge this past summer. They contributed more than 3,000 hours of labor and considerable materials as an in-kind match. More than a thousand trees and shrubs were planted, hand watered and weeded during this summer's severe drought. Native grasses and forbs were seeded and the area has come to life. That is reason to celebrate!

Recently, GOSA signed an agreement with the Ledyard-based Friends of Watrous Farm, LLC, to sponsor their project to protect the historic farm if an agreement is reached with the seller. As a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization, GOSA's role as a "fiscal sponsor" will be to accept donations on their behalf toward its purchase. The GOSA board agreed to support the fledgling group as a way to share hard-won knowledge and experience with a younger generation of conservationists—just the way Connecticut Forest & Park Association provided fiscal sponsorship in 1967 to the Save Haley Farm Committee, GOSA's forerunner. We are now paying that generosity forward.

2017 will be a very special year for GOSA, as we will celebrate our 50th anniversary! We of course invite you to join with us in celebrating a half-century of "protecting the wild" in Groton, and now also in Ledyard. Stay tuned! Check our website, newsletters, and Facebook for news of special celebratory events in 2017.

Finally, a very sad note. We mourn the death of [Edith Fairgrieve](#), former GOSA board member, who passed away August 6. We will miss Edith, her quiet manner, her "true north" moral compass, and her firm environmental advocacy.

Joan H. Smith



Eleanor and Fred Fischer, recipients of GOSA's highest volunteer honor, the Salamander Award.



GOSA News supports the mission and purpose of the Groton Open Space Association by publishing electronic newsletters that inform the public of past, present and future GOSA activities and threats to the health of open space. GOSA News also serves as a [link to the GOSA website](#), [gosaonline.org](#), for additional information and as a link to other key sites. Our mission is to inform and inspire the public to become actively involved. We welcome letters to the editor, which can be sent with the writer's name, address and daytime phone number via e-mail to: gosaemail@gmail.com.



GOSA Mission and Purpose To work to promote conservation, environmental preservation, open space and recreational areas in Southeastern Connecticut. To educate the public about the value of open space, conservation and environmental preservation. To enlist public support and funding to promote, acquire or maintain open space for public use, alone or in cooperation with local, state or federal agencies, or with other nonprofit organizations. GOSA is a nonprofit tax exempt organization under IRS Section 501(c)(3).

GOSA News Staff

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Photography: Pam Adams, Pat Olivier, Joan Smith, Eugenia Villagra

Membership To join, send a check to GOSA and include your name, address and e-mail. Annual dues are \$25 per year for individuals, \$30 for families.

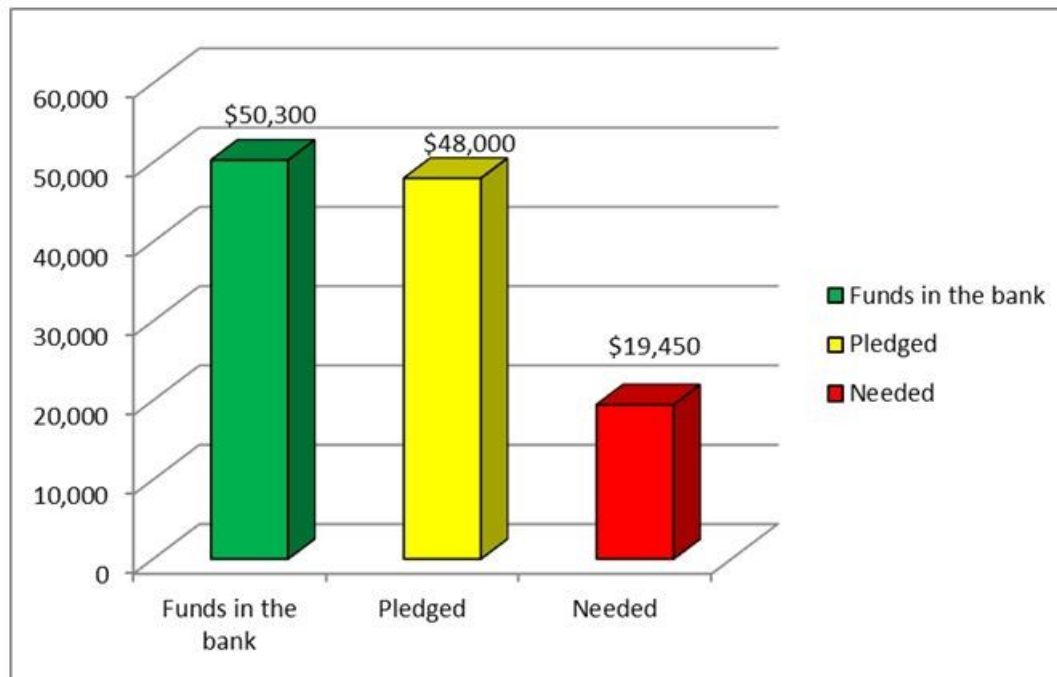
Groton Open Space Association, Inc.
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An Update on GOSA's Contribution to the Tilcon Property Acquisition

By Eugenia Villagra

Tilcon Fundraising to Date

GOSA Goal: \$117,750



Since launching our \$117,750 [Tilcon fundraiser](#) in mid August:

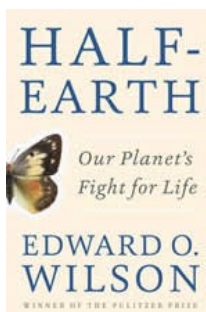
- **\$50,300 RAISED** thanks to generous support from individuals, local organizations, company matching funds, foundations and trusts.
- **\$48,000 PLEDGED** including \$25,000 in matching funds coming in from one anonymous donor and \$23,000 pledged by individuals and a foundation over a period of three years.
- **\$19,450 NEEDED** before the end of 2016, the state's estimated closing date.

We have made excellent progress, with only a few miles to go. If you haven't donated yet, or would like to donate again, [please click here to make a donation online](#) or send a check to:

GOSA, P.O. Box 9187, Groton, CT 06340-9187. **THANK YOU!**

Do you have an account at Charter Oak Credit Union? Double your donation!

[Click here](#) to learn about their matching program for charitable contributions.



Book Recommendation I understand why we conserve land, but have always wondered, how much conservation is enough? Is there such a number? The State of Connecticut has set a [conservation goal at 21%](#) for 2023; in the Town of Groton, roughly [14%](#) is currently preserved as "dedicated open space." To save our "imperiled biosphere" and "stave off the mass extinction of species," E.O. Wilson, conservation biologist *non plus ultra*, argues that the answer is half the earth. Written with an unusual sense of urgency and optimism. *Half-Earth* offers an attainable goal that we can strive for to protect the wild, the theme of this newsletter.

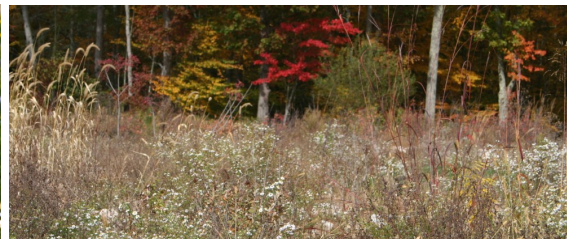
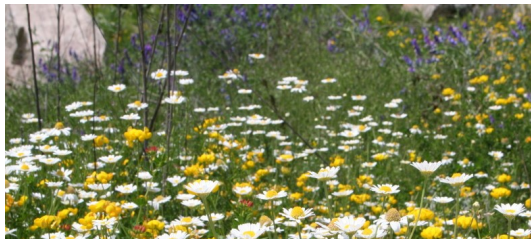


Sidney's Corner

By Sidney Van Zandt with Liz Raisbeck

Saving the Sprouts on Candlewood Ridge

Mother Nature dealt us a nasty blow this past summer by lashing us with a severe drought. You may remember that GOSA, with the help of nearly 60 Pfizer volunteers and others, dug 1000+ holes and planted 1,000+ baby shrubs and trees on a 6-acre gravel pit at the Candlewood Ridge property in the summer and fall of 2014. All the watering in the summer of '15 had to be done by hand and was accomplished with the great help of Center Groton Fire Department's water trucks. The trucks filled three plastic pools this summer compared to just one last summer with the "moderate" drought conditions.



Before and after, left to right: Candlewood Ridge gravel pit, prepared for planting summer of 2014 ; spring and fall flowers blooming in the former gravel pit in 2016. Photos by E. Villagra

This summer the fire trucks were back numerous times, but warding off the effects of drought with a bunch of gallon jugs seemed really daunting. So a new labor-saving plan was hatched by Board member Rob Scialabba, who trucked his generator to the site. Others brought their sump pumps, and we pumped water through hundreds of feet of hose to 40-gallon blue bins set in different areas among the young plants. Then it was just a hop, skip, and jump to water those babies with our gallon jugs. Talk about true devotion! It was hot and humid out there, but our volunteers never faltered, and neither did the Center Groton Fire Department. They saved the day on Candlewood Ridge and helped with so many other projects to improve our habitat.

I am pleased to report that almost all our new rabbitat is surviving. Many thanks to Pfizer, which sent 30 volunteers on October 7, joined by many other volunteers, who watered (hopefully for the last time this year), weeded, and cultivated around the baby shrubs, and then covered them with a loving layer of mulch, 15 cubic yards worth. A big project! Fall wildflowers and colors are spectacular on this former wasteland.



Pfizer employees spent their Day of Caring at GOSA's Candlewood Ridge improving habitat for the wild. Photo by J. Smith

Vacationing Beavers Allow Volunteers to Focus on Knotweed at Avery Farm

The beavers were on vacation this summer. There was so little rain, the beaver dam required almost no upkeep, and yet the pond retained water all summer, making for happy beavers. Relieved of beaver duty, GOSA volunteers led by Jim Anderson, Whitney Adams and Lon Thompson tackled—once again—the Japanese knotweed that has filled a large patch about 100 yards long and 20 yards wide along the blue trail past the beaver dam. Last year many groups of UConn Huskies, Sub Base volunteers, and others had cut the patch and cleared out jungles of bittersweet. This summer they weed-whacked and mowed the bittersweet several times. Their goal is eventually to replace it with little bluestem grass, a native species. Many new plants were added to the area, which also needed to be watered. When it comes to perseverance, the beavers have nothing on the volunteers!



*Above: invasive knotweed that grows 10' high
Below: little bluestem grass, a native variety. Public domain images.*

Learning from the Land

It is so exciting to see how the GOSA properties are turning into outdoor classrooms for people of all ages interested in nature and ecosystems. This summer I almost lost count of the number of groups we took out. Starting with National Trails Day on June 5, sixty people joined us for the Cross-Town Hike from Bluff Point to Beebe Cove. One elementary school teacher took his whole 5th-grade class on the hike.



Photo by J. Smith

Then, on July 21st, Joan Smith and I led twenty-three young summer campers in the Parks and Rec Summer Camp on an exploration of Haley Farm. The kids loved climbing on the rocks and exploring the 1880 tunnel under the railroad tracks, which was built as a subterranean cow crossing.

In September, board member Dr. Syma Ebbin and GOSA members took a group of 17 UConn students from Avery Point to explore the Sheep Farm. The experience was part of a service learning project, and

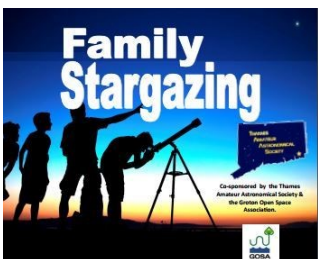
their goal is to develop outdoor environmental educational activities for visitors to enjoy at all of GOSA's properties. The students will also work on some informational posters on wildlife and invasive and native plants, including materials on outdoor activities for educational/publicity events. At the end of the semester in December the students will offer a presentation on this creative project, open to all GOSA members. And these were just a few of the many groups we led to explore GOSA properties!



Photo by P. Olivier

2016: A Mast Year for Oak Trees

Have you been out on a hike recently and been bopped on the head by falling acorns? Many of our hikers this summer found themselves slipping and sliding on so many acorns it felt as though bushels of ball bearings had been thrown across the trails. What was this all about? Every few years at unpredictable intervals, many tree species of the Northeast, especially oaks and beeches, produce massive amounts of nuts called mast crops ("mast" being another name for nut). It seems to be a survival strategy to make sure that forest critters won't be able to eat—or bury-- all their progeny every year. It guarantees that once the turkeys and woodpeckers have eaten their fill, and the chipmunks and squirrels have stored all they can fit into their caches, there will still be some left over to germinate. Mast crops tend to show up in a species over a large region at the same time. Probably most of New England is experiencing a mast crop of acorns this year, but the mid-West may not be. The next time you see a stand of young trees that is almost all maple, or all beech, or oak, and it doesn't look like it has been planted, it is probably the result of a mast year in an old pasture many years ago, where a few trees produced an army of their young.



Star-Gazing at Candlewood Ridge

A truly dark sky full of stars is a rare and wondrous thing in our civilized world. It can still be found up on Candlewood Ridge, where on an August night GOSA co-sponsored a [Family Stargazing](#) Night with the Thames Amateur Astronomical Society. It turned out to be a beautiful, relatively clear night for stargazing. At least six or seven astronomers set up their telescopes and trained them on Saturn, Polaris, and the M13 or Great Globular Cluster. We could also simply follow an astronomer's laser beam to see the outline of the Big and Little Dippers, Cygnus, the Milky

Way, and Cassiopeia, to name only a few. Around 55 people of all ages attended, an excellent turnout. We all agreed that Candlewood Ridge is a wonderful venue for stargazing and hope to star-gaze again soon.

GOSA Gala and Silent Auction

Kudos to Pat Olivier and her crew of 40 volunteers for putting on the best GOSA Gala and Silent Auction yet! On April 21, the Gala held at the Mystic Marriott broke a number of records including tickets sold (225), funds raised (\$32,250), and number of items on auction (120). Pat and Dave Olivier are pictured top left, the check-in table top center, and auction items, top right. Tom Day and Kate Scanlon, Friends of Watrous Farm, bottom left; the Gala event room, bottom center, and Sidney with Fred Ruszala, bottom right.



SALT Conference

SMALLER AMERICAN LAWNS TODAY

Deconstructing the American Landscape

Saturday, November 19, 2016
8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Professional landscapers, designers, and home gardeners are choosing to use native plants for many reasons—not only because they are beautiful and hardy, but also because they provide essential food and shelter for wildlife and help to maintain a unique sense of place. Join us for this day-long conference to discuss the demise of the American lawn, the definition of "native," and the future of native plants in our built landscapes.



CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

Keynote: *The Future of Native Plants in the Built Landscape*, Larry Weaner, Principal, Larry Weaner Landscape Associates

Award: New England Wild Flower Society will present the Regional Impact Award to New Directions in the American Landscape

Presentations:
Ecological Functions of Native Plants, Claudia West, Author and Ecological Sales Manager, North Creek Nurseries

Low-Maintenance Plants for the Deconstructed Landscape, Dan Jaffe, Horticulturist, New England Wild Flower Society

The Evolving American Lawn, Judy Preston, Connecticut Outreach Coordinator, Long Island Sound Study

Roundtable Discussion:
Defining Native, moderated by Mark Richardson, Director of Horticulture, New England Wild Flower Society

Connecticut College,
New London, CT

Members
\$65 before Nov 1
\$80 after Nov 1
Nonmembers
\$75 before Nov 1
\$90 after Nov 1

SALT Conference

The [spring 2015 issue of GOSA News](#) featured an article by Syma Ebbin titled "Is the Grass Always Greener?" that focused on the negative impacts on Long Island Sound of fertilizers used to obtain the richest, greenest monoculture of grass possible. A conference at Connecticut College takes us a step further on this topic, offering an alternative vision to the monocultured lawn.

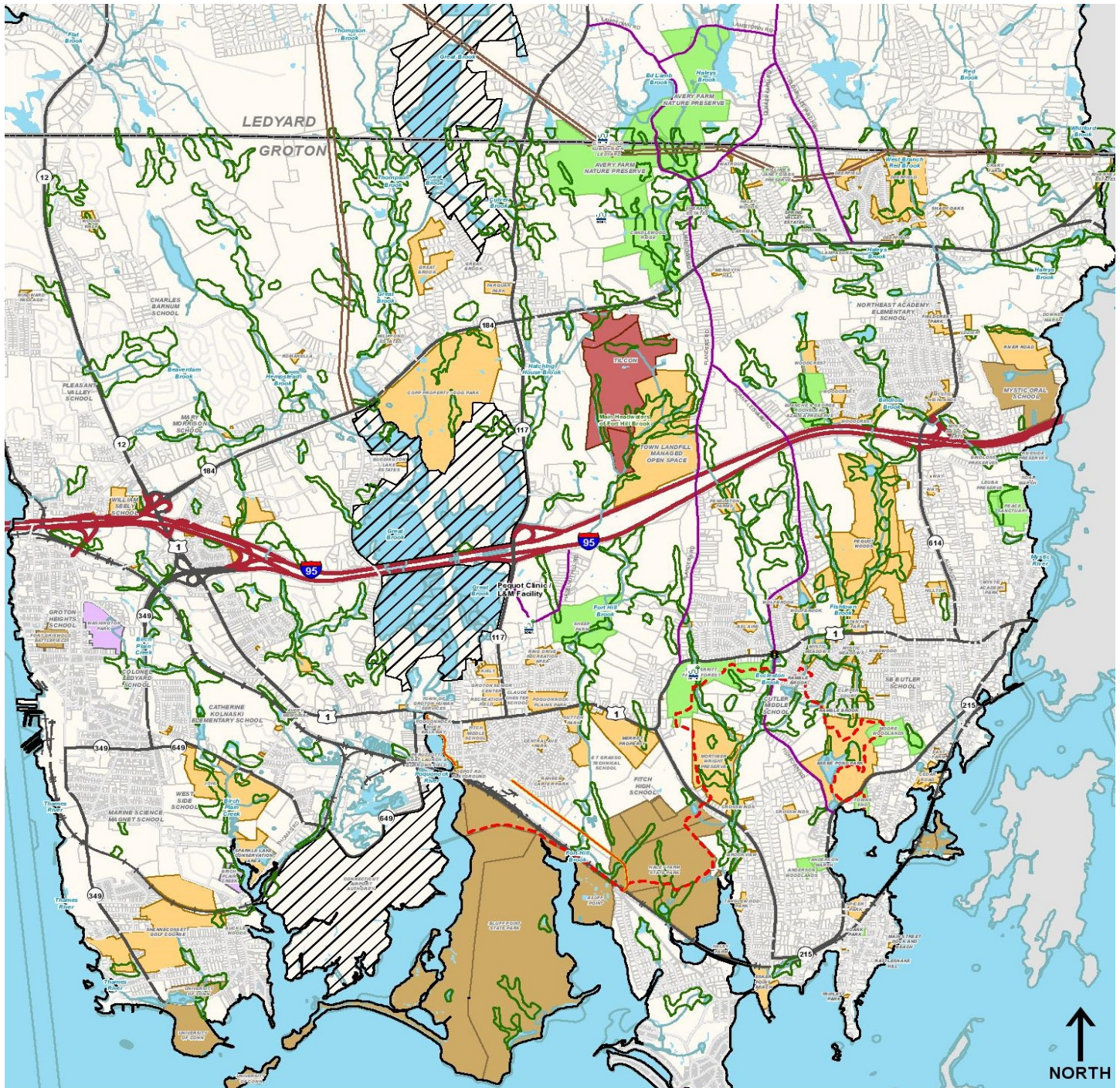
Smaller American Lawns Today, SALT, is a movement introduced in June of 1997 by Dr. William A. Niering, professor of botany at Connecticut College. The SALT mission is to decrease the size of lawns in America by restoring home grounds to more harmonious, productive, ecologically sound and naturalistic landscapes.

Natural beauty can abound in one's own yard. In the annual SALT seminar, participants learn how to cut back on the size of their lawns and also to have beautiful, sustainable, and friendly home grounds as well. Once established, you will never want to go back to a boring, monocultural lawn!

Click [here](#) for more details and registration information.

Groton Open Space Maps Getting Better and Better

One of my favorite projects has been working with Jenna Gosselin, the Town of Groton's GIS specialist, to update the town's open space maps on its website. Jenna has been steadily adding to the map GOSA, Avalonia, Nature Conservancy, and town-owned properties that have been preserved and are open to the public. For the first time, the town's map (cropped below to fit on the page) includes parts of Ledyard to show linked open spaces and complete watersheds; you can also see the pitch pine ridge property (rust colored) owned by Tilcon Corporation in central Groton located between Routes 95 and 184. Also really exciting are the many streams that run from or through these open spaces and into our reservoirs. Much of the watershed of Fort Hill Brook, Ecklestone Brook, and Haley Brook are already or soon will be protected, going all the way from Ledyard to Long Island Sound. If you love oysters, these protected watersheds will guarantee clean water for our LIS oyster growers and clean water flowing into our reservoirs. Click on the map image below to see a full-size version with a legend.



Map credit: Town of Groton, GIS Coordinator Jenna Gosselin



Why Connecticut Needs a Constitutional Amendment to Protect State Property

By Liz Raisbeck and Eugenia Villagra

Photo by E. Villagra

The Mystic Education Center, formerly known as the Mystic Oral School.

One of the many wonderful things about life in the beautiful State of Connecticut, the land of steady habits, is the comforting knowledge that when we visit one of our state parks or wildlife areas, those lands are set aside “in perpetuity,” for all time.

You may be surprised to find out that according to a report from the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) titled [“Preserved but Maybe Not: Impermanence of State Constitution Lands”](#), “[r]ecent proposals to exchange or convey state parks, forests and wildlife areas totaling hundreds of acres have highlighted weaknesses in the protections granted to Connecticut’s conservation lands. These weaknesses could result in the sudden ‘unpreservation’ and subsequent development of those lands...” Maybe not so steady after all.

Last spring a coalition of concerned citizens and environmental organizations, including GOSA, launched a letter-writing campaign urging the Connecticut legislature to pass a constitutional amendment to set the bar higher for such land conveyances.

The General Assembly took the first step last May to plug this huge loophole in state law regarding land preservation thanks to the hundreds of letters that poured into the legislature from all over the state, including many from you. [Senate Joint Resolution 36](#) (S.J. 36), which passed both chambers on the last day of the session, would establish that to make a

land conveyance 1) there must be a public hearing on any proposal to convey state lands to another party, and 2) the legislature must produce a two-thirds majority vote on each property voted on.

S.J. 36 received the required three-fourths majority vote in the Senate, but only a simple majority vote in the House. Under the rules for a constitutional amendment, the same resolution must be passed by the General Assembly in the 2017 or 2018 session for it to appear on the ballot in November, 2018. The passage of S.J. 36 was an important victory, a critical step forward. We will be keeping our members and friends apprised of the next step on this journey and asking for your support again.

Meanwhile, closer to home, GOSA is keeping an eye on developments with the state-owned Mystic Education Center in Groton. The 114-acre property, formerly the Mystic Oral School, is controlled by two state agencies: the Department of Administrative Services (DAS), which administers 48 acres, and the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), which administers 66 acres. Last March, GOSA learned that the state planned to gift the DAS acres to Groton by means of the 2016 Conveyance Act—without a local public hearing—exactly the scenario described by the CEQ. Even though the letter-writing campaign and the advocacy of Rep. André Bumgardner resulted in the removal of the Groton conveyance from the bill, the “For Sale” sign on the DAS-owned property, up since 2011, is still up; fortunately, we recently confirmed that DEEP will retain and protect its all-forested portion.

[A July article in The Day](#) revealed that economic development officials from Groton and the state are now planning to market more actively the DAS portion of the Center’s land to a prospective developer. It is important that there be a full public process as these plans go forward.



Photo by E. Villagra

Where the Wild Things Are: Fabulous Beasts of Long Island Sound

By Syma A. Ebbin



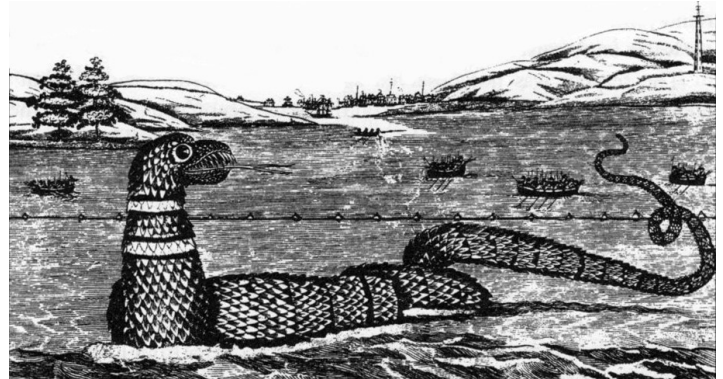
A sea serpent glides by North Dumpling Island in Fishers Island Sound virtually undetected. Photo by Syma Ebbin, photoshopped by Aaron Kane.

For the past eight years, my children have attended school out on Fishers Island, sailing back and forth on the ferry twice a day. When I head out on the ferry to attend concerts and school plays, I perennially scan the waters for traces of the wild: the errant sea turtle, *mola mola* (ocean sunfish), finning shark, dolphin, whale, or perhaps a lost manatee. I haven't been lucky enough yet to see any of these from my perch on the ferry, although this past summer my cousins were, capturing a few digital images of humpback whales swimming along the western edge of Fishers. I certainly haven't been as lucky as lobsterman Captain G. Courland Paine was, when on the 7th of February in 1887, he sighted a sea serpent from his boat off of middle ledge near Fishers Island. You might think sea serpent sightings in Long Island Sound to be a thing of myth or an urban legend of old, but you'd be wrong.

Sea serpents have been spotted from shore and at sea for many hundreds of years by sailors, fishermen, and random sea gazers in waters all over the world. The late-19th century Dutch zoologist, Anthonie Cornelis Oudemans, analyzed sea-serpent sightings as far back as 1522. The twentieth century French-Belgian scientist and explorer, Bernard Heuvelmans, credited as the originator of the field of cryptozoology or the study of "hidden" animals, provides a list of documented sightings of "large serpentiform sea-animals of all kinds thought to be unknown to science" in his book, *In The Wake of Sea-Serpents*. The first observation noted occurred in 1639, off the coast of Cape Ann, Massachusetts, followed by sightings in the waters of Norway, Mauritius, Australia, Maine, among many other locations. The oral histories of some indigenous peoples are rich with stories and observations of sea serpents, expand-

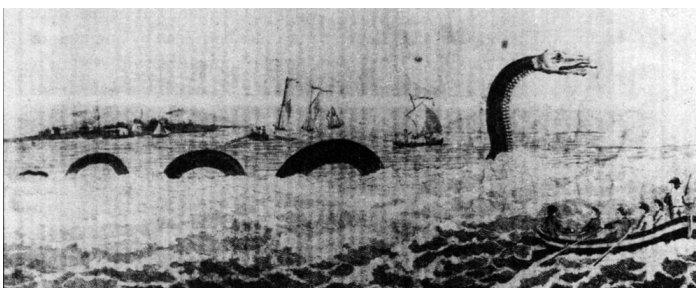
ing the spatial extent and pushing back the chronological record of sightings.

In 1817, so many people reported seeing a sea serpent off the coast of Gloucester, Massachusetts that the Linnaean Society of New England commissioned an investigation to better understand the nature and identity of the creature being viewed. The resulting report, written by the honorable John Davis, Dr. Jacob Bigelow, and Francis Gray, Esquire, and published in Boston in October of that year,



Gloucester sea serpent of 1817. Source: Ellis, R. 1994. *Monsters of the Sea*. Robert Hale Ltd.

shared evidence about the events, including interviews, taken as depositions under oath, of those who had observed the creature, recounting a dozen eye witness accounts of those who had spotted the beast. The authors concluded that the sea serpent was a new species of snake which they classified as *Scoliophis atlanticus*.¹



The first American sea serpent, reported from Cape Ann, Massachusetts, in 1639. Source: Ellis, R. 1994. *Monsters of the Sea*. Robert Hale Ltd.

Later that year, two additional sightings of sea serpents were reported in Long Island Sound and included as an appendix to the Linnaean Society's account. Thomas Hertell of Rye Neck, New York, on October 21st, 1817 wrote in a letter published in a New York newspaper "...On Sunday the 5th inst. at 10 o'clock A.M. while standing a few rods from my house on Rye-Neck, I observed at a short distance to the southward and eastward of Mr. Ezekiel Halstead's dwelling on Rye Point, and perhaps not half a mile from the shore, a long, rough, dark looking, body, progressing rapidly up sound (towards New York), against a brisk breeze



United States servicemen holding a 23-foot giant oarfish, found washed up on the shore near San Diego, California, in September 1996. The oarfish article can be found on page 20 of the [April 1997 issue of All Hands](#).

and a strong ebb tide. Viewing it with my glass convinced me it was a large living animal.—His back forty to fifty feet of which was seen above the surface of the water, appeared to be irregular, uneven, and deeply indented ... From the time I first saw him till I lost sight of him, perhaps could not have exceeded ten minutes, in which short time he had gone probably not less than six or seven miles.”

Hertell remarked that the same animal was seen by Mr. James Guion two days previous to himself, while overlooking the east side of Mamaroneck Harbour, as well as others who spied the animal nearing the light house on Sand's Point. Hertell concludes “That it was a sea animal of great bulk, to me is certain – That it is what is usually called a Sea Serpent, and the same which appeared in Gloucester harbor [sic], is only probable.”

In the waters of Long Island Sound, Hertell's and Guion's observations are the first recorded, but additional sightings continued well into the next century, as documented by J.P. O'Neill in her 2003 book *The Great New England Sea Serpent*. The year following Hertell's sighting, another serpent was sighted on June 19, 1818 off Sag Harbor in Long Island Sound, NY, and then again in the Sound during the summer of 1877, followed by more sightings in subsequent years. In 1896, it was spotted near Port Washington and later that year over two hundred witnesses observed a serpent-like creature near Lighthouse Point in New Haven Harbor. Several other Long Island Sound-based sightings in the beginning of the 20th century occurred in 1901 and 1902 and were reported by the U.S. Coast Guard off of Montauk in 1929.

As it stands, the mystery of the identity of the sea serpent has not been satisfactorily resolved. Many known species have been proposed that might be responsible for some of the reported sightings: the deep dwelling and little understood oarfish (*Regalecus glesne*), basking shark (*Cetorhinus maximus*), kraken or giant squid (*Architeuthis* spp.), bluefin tuna (tunny or horse mackerel) (*Thunnus thynnus*), various species of marine mammals: whales, seals and dolphins, and a menagerie of other known species. Others have suggested the intriguing idea that these serpents may be “living fossils”, surviving members of spe-

cies thought to be extinct such as the Coelacanth was before an actual specimen was caught off the coast of South Africa in 1938. Jurassic-era species have been proposed including the reptilian plesiosaur and Eocene-epoch whale species named Zeuglodon². And of course there is the possibility that they are simply creatures which are unknown and undescribed, unlike existing or previously existing species known to humans. According to experts who've analyzed large numbers of sightings, no one species noted here would satisfactorily explain all the varied descriptions of sea serpents reported through time. Heuvelmans classified 358 sightings into nine possible categories indicating the possibility of multiple sea-serpent species. Whatever the ultimate identity of the sea serpent, whether one species or many, known or unknown, it or they remain elusive, and likely rare.

Noted conservation biologist, E.O. Wilson reminds us in his recent book *Half-Earth: Our Planet's Fight for Life*, that most of life on Earth remains unknown to us because many of these lifeforms are rare, isolated in narrow niches, and limited to small or remote habitats. Estimates of Earth's biodiversity, the number of distinct species, varies wildly. The number of known species described and classified by scientists has just surpassed two million. The number yet to be discovered is unknown but thought to range from five million to over 100 million. As new species evolve, others may go extinct, sometimes after being replaced by one or more new “daughter” species. Extinction is a natural phenomenon as is the development of new species through the process of speciation. The rate of extinction has climbed in recent years to levels unsurpassed since previous waves of mass extinction—one hundred to over one thousand (perhaps upwards of 10,000 according to some experts) times greater than background rates of extinction³ prior to the advent of humans two hundred thousand years ago.

Five extinction events have been identified so far. This current wave, however, is not due to a meteor strike or other tectonic, biogeochemical or cosmological impact, but rather a result of human actions on earth including: the increasing development and transformation of Earth's ecosystems, exploitation of species, introduction of exotic species,

pollution, degradation and complete elimination of critical habitats, and more recently, the alteration of the chemical composition of the atmosphere and ocean resulting in changing temperature and precipitation regimes and acidifying waters, among other impacts. There is no reason to believe that undiscovered species are subject to different rates of extinction than known species, leading to the probability that, as Wilson puts it, “[H]umanity is losing the race between the scientific study of global biodiversity and the obliteration of countless still-unknown species.”

Could sea serpents, these fabulous, unknown creatures, become extinct before they have been identified, “pinned and wriggling on the wall”, as T.S. Eliot might observe? Or could they have already been driven to extinction? Unfortunately, the answer to both questions is yes. One remedy, which may at least partially allay this tide of accelerating extinctions, is to set aside parts of the globe from human use and to expand the focus from conservation of individual species to the preservation of entire habitats and ecosystems. We have a long history designating and preserving land as wilderness, but setting aside underwater land has only recently gained traction as a strategy for ma-

rine protection. In fact the U.N. Environment Programme notes that roughly 15.4% of the world’s land area is protected while only 3.4% of the ocean is. More and larger marine sanctuaries and marine protected areas are being designated around the world, increasing the extent of protected waters. These areas are subject to a diversity of management approaches, allowing various human uses and prohibiting others, depending on the conservation objectives. Some allow extractive activities like recreational and commercial fishing, others are restricted to passive recreation.

Using the Antiquities Act, President Obama recently designated a vast swath of water, 4,913 square miles, off the coast of New England as the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument. This followed Obama’s quadrupling of the size of the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument off of the Hawaiian archipelago, originally designated by former President George W. Bush, to 582,578 square miles. The monument now holds the title of largest ecologically protected space on Earth. The *Day* newspaper described the new Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Monument⁴ area

The Sea Serpent by Claudius Jones⁵, published in the *Saturday Review of Literature* Oct. 12, 1929, submitted to the 66th competition of “The Wit’s Weekly” contest focused on sea serpents. The contest yielded almost 200 submissions. This one did not get awarded the \$15, 1st place prize, but I think it’s terrific and to the point!

The sea-serpent in languor curved
About a rock, the world observed.
How all the beasts and birds
And fishes too, from near and far
Were pigeon-holed by genera
And tagged with Latin words.

“They lose thereby, each one,” said he,
“His individuality
And influence to boot
The others mark his spot or stripe,
Ignore the beast but not the type
And pitch their praise to suit.”

So sailormen he shunned, save such
As a double grog had drunk too much
And had a mighty bun on,
“For these,” said he, “will ne’er agree”
Some give me one head, some say three,
And some that I have none on.

“They credit one with variation,
A virtue in intoxication
As excellent, as rare.”
And then he swore, while life was his,
To be just sui generis,
A fearful oath to swear.

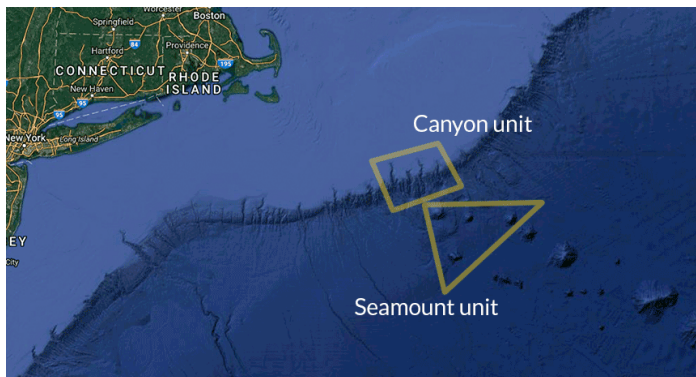


Maned sea serpent from Bishop Erik Pontoppidan's 1755 work, Natural History of Norway. Source: Ellis, R. 1998. The Search for the Giant Squid. The Lyons Press.

For still the world in anger raves
Not have so hard at cheats and knaves,
Its anger all is turned
On harmless chaps whose end and glory
Is not to fit a category:
This truth our hero learned.

In boat and place and submarine
Bewhiskered pundits, students keen
Pursued him day and night,
Inventing terms of barb’rous Latin
That Julius Caesar could not chat in
Or Cicero recite.

At Last, of food and sleep bereft—
No leisure more or refuge left –
Of long pursuit he tired,
And softly murm’ring e’er he died,
“Thank God, I died unclassified!”
Resignedly expired.



Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument encompasses 4,913 square miles and is the first of its kind in the U.S. Atlantic Ocean.

as a “home to majestic 12,000-foot-tall peaks, deep canyons, 9-foot-tall corals and species of marine life that have not yet been named.” The same article quoted Dr. Peter Auster, research scientist with the Mystic Marinelife Aquarium and one of the proponents of the designation. He characterized this underwater region as “Dr. Seuss’s garden,” and commented, “This is a place in one of the most studied parts of the ocean where you can still find big animals that don’t have names yet ... We’re still figuring out what species are there and how they interact with each other.”

So “[w]hy do we need monsters?” asks author Richard Ellis in *Monsters of the Sea*. “As mythological creatures, they are obsolete, and as commercial objects, they seem to have outlived their usefulness. As endangered species, however, they serve to remind us of our own frailty—and also of our responsibility to preserve the planet—which may actually be their most important function.” But monsters may have other important functions, clarifying in our minds the knowledge that not everything is known, the frontier has not disappeared entirely, and that we as humans may be civilized but not necessarily domesticated creatures. Wild things and wild nature may be essential to simply being human animals.

Henry David Thoreau famously wrote in his essay *Walking*, posthumously published in the *Atlantic*, that “...in wildness is the preservation of the world ... Give me a wildness whose glance no civilization can endure—as if we lived on the marrow of koodoos devoured raw ... Hope and the future for me are not in lawns and cultivated fields, not in towns and cities, but in the impervious and quaking swamps.” That “impermeable and unfathomable” swamp was “the jewel which dazzled” him, a wild place not unlike the ocean, which he considered during his travels on the Cape to be “...a wilderness reaching round the globe, wilder than a Bengal jungle, and fuller of monsters...” That ocean—impenetrable, unfathomable, and unknowable—is a sublime example of wildness.

The ocean still seems a mysterious place, a wild space where wild things might still roam and, as Maurice Sendak put it, “roar their terrible roars and gnash their terrible teeth, roll their terrible eyes and show their terrible claws.” The ocean might be the kind of place where a wild rumpus could begin and a person’s inner beast emerge. Bernard

Heuvelmans wrote of the need for monsters to exist: to attract us, seduce us, trouble us, captivate, and even to illuminate us. Writing in his *Natural History of Hidden Animals*, he notes that “The dog, the cat, the horse and a few others live at our sides, but as for the monsters, they live in us. They are the most sure guarantors for the peace of our souls.” Perhaps the existence of wild things and places is actually essential, as the transcendental movement believed, to nurturing and cultivating our very humanness.

Officially, according the International Union of Geological Sciences, Earth is now in the Holocene epoch. Some experts, however, notably atmospheric scientist Paul Crutzen, believe we have entered the Anthropocene, a period when human actions dominate Earth’s ecosystems, its lithosphere, atmosphere, hydrosphere and biosphere in ways that geological forces have done in previous time periods. Wilson prefers to call this new epoch the Eremocene, the Age of Loneliness, an age of humans surrounded by domesticated animals and agricultural fields, a world bereft of the wild and untamed biosphere that once was.

Wild space and wild things are critical—whether to protect rare and endangered species or to supply an antidote to the banality and stress of modern life. We need wild places and the wild creatures that may dwell within them. In protecting wild and open spaces in this region, the Groton Open Space Association has laid a foundation for their protection. We may indeed be entering the Anthropocene, but let us share it with the other fabulous beasts, those creatures known and those who may remain undiscovered, who roam the waters and lands of this Earth at this time. And by retaining this wildness, we may indeed preserve the world.

Endnotes:

¹Unfortunately, it was later determined that they were mistaken in their attribution of the sea serpent’s juvenile phase to a deformed black snake found along the shores of Loblolly Cove near Gloucester. Click [here](#) to read more.

² Originally thought to be a reptilian dinosaur called *Basilosaurus*, it was later reclassified and renamed.

³ Background rates of extinction are estimated to be between one and five species per year according to the Center for Biological Diversity.

⁴ The new monument includes two units: the Canyons Unit which encompasses 941 square miles and the Seamounts Unit which encompasses 3,972 square miles. You can read the entire Presidential Proclamation establishing this monument at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/09/15/presidential-proclamation-northeast-canyons-and-seamounts-marine>.

⁵ This poem was excerpted from J.P. O’Neill’s 2003 book, *The Great New England Sea Serpent*.

About the Author: Syma Ebbin began the research for this article as a National Endowment for the Humanities-funded Munson Fellow at Mystic Seaport during the summer of 2016. For her day job, she is an associate professor at UConn’s Avery Point campus and the research coordinator for Connecticut Sea Grant. She also serves on the GOSA Board of Directors.