

Dennis Conservation Land Trust

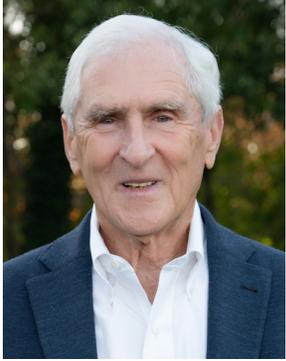
Year-End Newsletter, 2023

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President's Message

Joseph Masse, President, Board of Trustees



This year marks the 35th year the Dennis Conservation Land Trust has worked to ensure what we leave behind bears a resemblance to what we ourselves inherited. This is how we have chosen to make a difference.

Those who moved here in the late 1980s inherited an environment in turmoil as the population of Dennis had swelled from 6,454 people in 1970 to 12,360 by 1980. From 1970 to 1980, the population of the Town of Dennis grew by 92%, the County of Barnstable by 53%, and the State by 1%.

“What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make.”

—Jane Goodall

Woods and fields were turned from open space into homes and businesses. We went from a place of tranquility to one of hustle and bustle, leaving only the peace of winter for those folks who don't retreat to off-season homes elsewhere.

This was the environment in which 11 individuals met and chose to create a citizen's response to preserve what they could of what was left. Connie Bechard, Carole Bell, Florence Crockett, Joel Crowell, Alice Dingman, Ed Gelsthorpe, Richard Johnston, Beverley LeBlanc, Edmond Nickerson, Norton Nickerson, and Richardson Reid were the founders of the Dennis Conservation Trust.

Though the name has changed to the Dennis Conservation Land Trust, the mission remains the same: “We conserve land and promote sound conservation practices through environmental education, science, and advocacy while working with

others who share common values in preserving land, nature, and our community's quality of life.”



DCLT's Trustees at the Annual Auction in 2004

New Trustees have come and gone and today 17 Trustees, six Trustees Emeriti, seven Advisors, and innumerable volunteers carry on in an ever more difficult “environment.” Thankfully, despite the challenges, there are always those who care and choose to make a difference.

The Trust, in its 35 years, with wonderful support from residents of the Town of Dennis, has been able to preserve nearly 700 acres of open space. At the same time, the Trust's advocacy has reached many ears and you have responded with continuing support.

Your involvement in creating a town that is environmentally aware, involved, and responsive will be the key to ensuring the health and well-being of every creature, plant, or person that calls Dennis “home.”

Join us! Spread the word! Advocate! Make a difference!

“The earth has its music for those who will listen.”

—Reginald Holmes

35 Years Steady on the Rise

David Fryxell, Ph.D., Executive Director and Ecologist

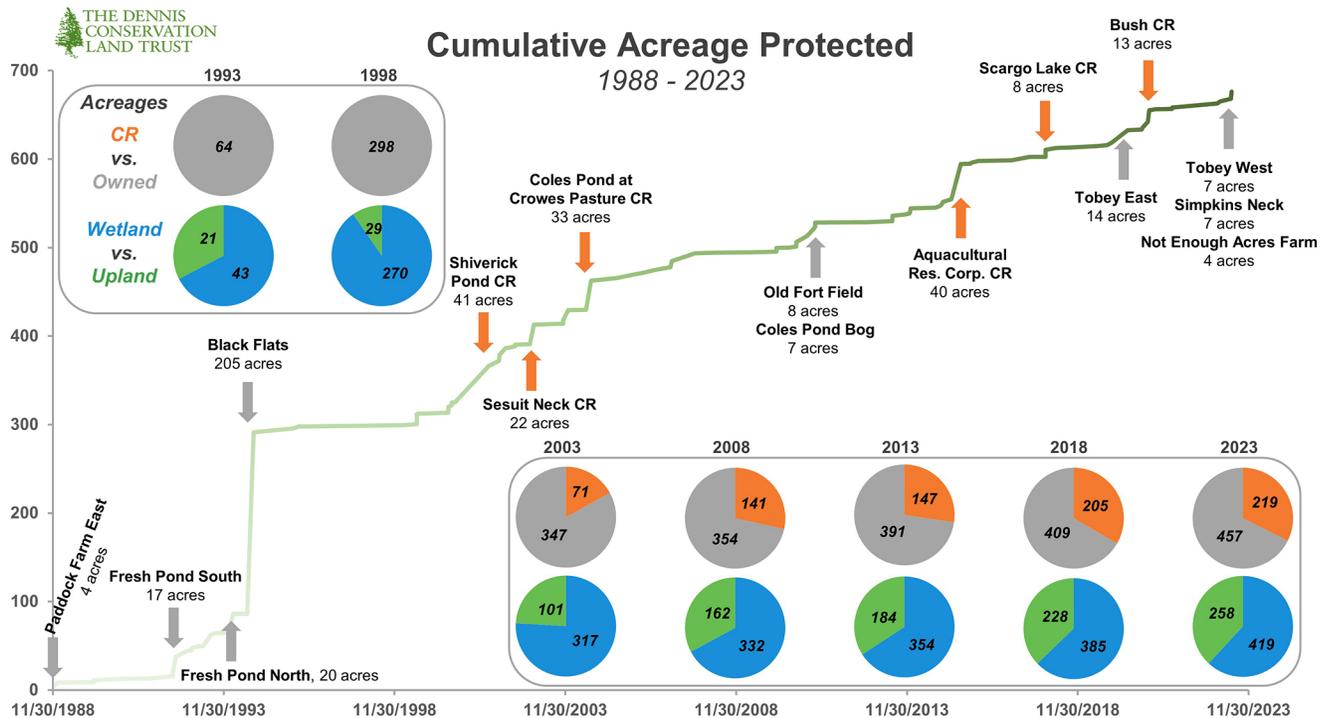
“I think having land and not ruining it is the most beautiful art that anybody could ever want.”

—Andy Warhol

At the end of this year, we reflect not only upon the past 12 months but upon all 35 years since our founding. In 1988, the Trust was started as a grassroots alliance of residents working to save the natural beauty of their Town of Dennis. They wasted no time in protecting land by acquiring properties and conservation restrictions, all while working to protect some of the hallmark conservation areas now owned by the Town. While the Trust’s stated purposes and goals have not changed at all since it started, we have been steadily building capacity to achieve them more holistically. Here I provide a brief overview of our first 35 years

of land conservation, including some inspiring successes from this past one.

The Trust acquired ownership of its first property just seven months into its existence and almost exactly 35 years ago. “Paddock Farm East,” as we have come to call it, is 3.5 acres of former cranberry bog adjacent to the historic Paddock Family cemetery off Route 6A in East Dennis. The Trust raised \$6,500 for the acquisition, a purchase soon followed by a series of land donations that really put DCLT on the map.



Through the early 90s, several parcels of land were donated outright to the Trust, including some of the largest properties we now protect through ownership. Thirty-seven acres of land were gifted on either side of Fresh Pond, the second largest

freshwater pond in Dennis. The Clark Family then donated 205 acres of the Black Flats saltmarsh on Chase Garden Creek. We are reminded of their generosity every time we look left while heading out to Chapin Beach on Dr. Bottero Road.



DCLT's 205-acre Black Flats Property, donated in 1994



DCLT's new headquarters—Not Enough Acres Farm

Since the turn of the century, the amount of land protected by the Trust has been steadily on the rise. At that time, the Trust began working with property owners to place Conservation Restrictions (CRs) on their privately owned land. CRs ensure a property is maintained in a natural and unbuilt, or agricultural state, forever, and can remain under private ownership. Landowners may be incentivized to participate due to a reduction in their property tax burden, but most are motivated by a deep love for their land coupled with a forward-thinking conservation ethic. For our 41-acre Shiverick Pond CR, we thank the Nordblom Family. For our 22-acre Sesuit Neck CR, we thank the Crowell Family. Taken together with additional CRs later given to the Trust by the Babcocks, Sears, and Crowells, we have now protected 72 acres of land on Sesuit Neck by CR alone.

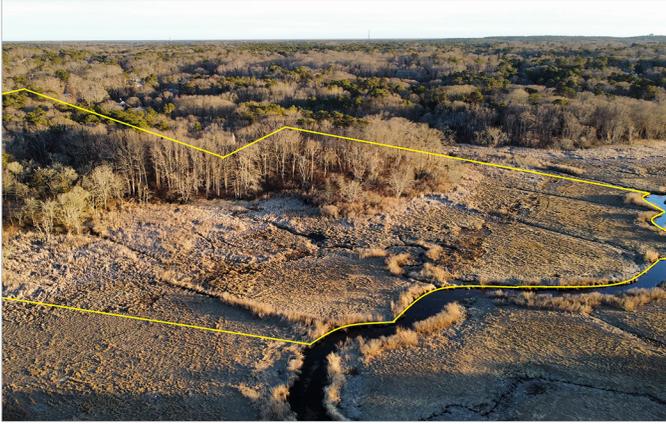
By the mid-2000s, the Trust had begun its “Save the Crowe” initiative, marking the beginning of a series of land protection projects the DCLT has completed in collaboration with the Town of Dennis. In some cases, such as Crowes Pasture, the Aquacultural Research Corporation, the Holl Property at Scargo

Lake, and most recently, the Bush Property (adjacent to the Indian Lands), the collaboration resulted in Town ownership of the land and a CR held by the Trust. In other cases, such as Old Fort Field, Tobey East, and Tobey West, the collaboration resulted in a CR held by the Town and ownership by the Trust. In all cases, DCLT received priceless technical support from our colleagues at The Compact of Cape Cod Conservation Trusts, which holds CRs on other DCLT properties, such as Coles Pond Bog.

Since the 205-acre Black Flats acquisition of 1994, the Trust has protected property at a steady rate of 13.3 acres per year. This past year, we added 17.8 acres to that ledger. We purchased a 6.5-acre portion of the Tobey West property and have agreements in place to acquire another 4.4-acre portion in the future. We added to the 17 acres of land we previously acquired on Simpkins Neck with another 7.1 acres donated by the Barrett Family. And of course, the Trust sprang at the chance to acquire the 4.2-acre Not Enough Acres Farm property, which long-time owners, and now DCLT friends, Jeff and Beth (Crowell) Deck, charitably agreed to sell to us for what these days is a bargain.

Our founders outlined a clear vision for the future in their 1988 Declaration of Trust. Five procedural amendments to that document later, our purposes remain entirely unchanged. At the heart of them is to “promote the preservation of the rural character

of the Town of Dennis” as well as “for preservation of marshland, swamps, and other wetlands.” To date, we have protected 676 acres of land in Dennis. A significant proportion of it – 62% by acreage – is wetland. But our stated purposes go well beyond



DCLT's Tobey West Property, acquired 2022-2024



Simpkins Neck (right) on Chase Garden Creek, owned by DCLT and the town

land preservation, including “to engage in ecological and scientific study” and “for the education and training of persons interested in conservation and the biological sciences.” To those ends, we’re also on the rise.

“laboratory” space of the house, our Community Science volunteers processed weekly water samples from across the Town. Deriving inspiration from the new office setting, DCLT Volunteer of the Year Linda Blake even took a deep research dive into the history of wildlife on Cape Cod, as she reports later in this Newsletter.



DCLT interns Kayly and Molly prepare experiments at the Farm

The acquisition this year of our headquarters at Not Enough Acres Farm revives the breadth of our founders’ vision. As soon as we moved into the property in July, our “Environmental Study Center” came to life. Out front, the Cape Cod Mosquito Control Project tested a novel trap for nuisance deerflies. In back, a member kept beehives as he sought to learn the craft. Our DY High School interns used the barn to run experiments for the coming science fair, and downstairs, in the new

While our Mission remains the same, the faces of the Trust are ever changing. This year we accepted resignations from founding Trustee, Carole Bell (see the next article) and Trustee, Norm Taupeka. We welcomed Christine Eosco and Ann Risso into the Trustee role. We brought on an inspiring slate of Advisors, including Mark Kesling, Molly Gedutis, John Bujalski, and Sarah Rothermel. Each of them has already offered so much to the Trust.

Looking back at the past year and the 34 years that preceded it, we should feel proud of what we have accomplished and grateful to all of those who have helped. The 676 acres we have protected, the acquisition of our new home, and our steadily growing impact is a testament to the dedication of countless Trustees, Advisors, members, and volunteers, both past and present. Here’s to staying steady on rise in 2024, and indeed, for many years to come.

Tribute to Carole Walker Bell, Trustee Emeritus

Connie Bechard, Trustee



Carole Walker Bell, Founding Trustee

Hurricane Carol swept through the Cape around the same time that Carole Walker was growing up on Whig Street in Dennis Village. As a child, she was immersed in village activities, Girl Scouts, 4-H, the annual Christmas party for children, and horseback riding on the sandy trails through the beautiful unspoiled edges of the Village, a place where everyone knew everyone. As Carole began to grow into her own “hurricane force,” she graduated from college, married her husband Bill Bell, and raised their children with a passion and love that continues to this day. Carole’s ever-present humor stems back to her grandfather, Ben Walker, who was a fisherman at Corporation Beach, and is said to have used his truck to push his boat into the water at low tide. Carole’s father, Dan Walker had a terrific sense of humor, and endowed Carole with a quick wit in almost every situation.

Carole was aware of the importance of protecting wild natural habitats and recognized that overdevelopment would forever change these special places. She jumped into being involved as a founding Trustee of the DCLT in 1988. Carole was instrumental in bringing forward the first pieces of land on Simpkins Neck, and continued nonstop protecting property that could be preserved into the quilt of natural habitats that exist today in the Trust’s protection of nearly 700 acres of land throughout the town of Dennis.

In 2004, the gas station at the Nobscussett Road corner and the entrance to the beaches formerly owned by her dad Dan Walker and Paul McDowell, had been closed and

the land was going to be developed into a Cumberland Farms. Carole brought a grassroots group together with the Village Improvement Society (of which Carole was a leader) and partnered successfully with the Town of Dennis to un-develop the former gas station and create a pocket park. Now known as Nobscusset Park, Carole’s leadership preserved the beautiful park anchoring the corner across the street from the children’s playground, and led to the creation of a new parking lot and connecting a path along Route 6A to the village training field in the Village Green. Now, as President of the VIS, an integral part of the mission of the VIS is bringing simple enjoyment of village life on these grounds with band concerts, art shows, or just a quiet place to pause on a busy day.



Nobscusset Park, Dennis Village

Carole was an active leader in the preservation of Crowes Pasture. While on the Trust, she served as Vice President, chaired the Land Committee, and was involved in the details of acquisition, negotiation, fundraising, and cheerleading, all while carrying out her duties as mother, grandmother, wife, village advocate, and relentless defender of natural spaces.

Carole as Trustee Emeritus continues to stay totally involved in many aspects of the Trust and to advocate strongly for preserving the future of not only Dennis Village, but the Town of Dennis. Thank you, Carole!

Unnatural Silence

Ronald Harrison Fenn, DCLT Member



Listen...

Where are the wild sounds
that restore fear and respect
dipped into the forest morning dew
the sweat gathered by climate onto trees
these guardians of place

I listen again ...

outside of me
to the rise of the wolves
they join in the jet streaming its engine
the fire engine sirens of hot spots
somewhere far away
the silence teems with wild moans
issuing from the lungs, stomach, throat and teeth
into wild long moans
howls of wolves
invisible creatures
to shining jackets
from their busy alien world

sounds of top form
perfected over millennia
mastered in concert or alone
what do they translate
to others is clear
no question of authenticity
these wild wails harmonizing
in haunting language

From the Journal and Other Writings of Ronald Harrison Fenn,
Collection of Short Poems; Volume 5 © 9/23/2023

The Demise and Rise of Cape Wildlife

Linda Blake, DCLT Volunteer

Recently I learned of the Great Auk, a flightless seabird that came from Canada to overwinter on Cape Cod and the Islands. I discovered that it is just one of many missing species that comprised the Cape's wildlife as recently as a couple hundred years ago. Intrigued to learn more about these "northern penguins," as well as the Cape's other lost species, I wondered what exactly happened and whether they might return. For several Fridays I set out to DCLT's "Environmental Study Center" to conduct research on the topic. What I learned was at times disheartening but inspiring overall. It became this brief history of wildlife on Cape Cod.

EXTINCTION



The Great Auk (extinct)

The Great Auk, *Pinguinus impennis*, was all-but-technically a penguin. Unfortunately, its soft, down feathers were of similar profit to the mammal furs once abundant and so aggressively pursued throughout the colonial era. The Auk was also abundant even after decades of intense hunting pressure. In 1794, writers on Cape Cod included

the "Penguin" as one of the sea fowl that was then "plenty on the shores and in the bay." But consistent overharvest in New England and elsewhere established the fate of the Auk well before its final demise. Recognizing they had become rare, private and museum collectors sought to preserve at least an icon of what was once our northern penguin, ultimately sealing the Great Auk's fate. By the mid-1800s the Auk was not only erased from Cape Cod but had gone completely extinct.

In some ways, this history of the Great Auk is the story of wildlife across Cape Cod and New England. Many colonists arrived with the mindset that nature could and should be tamed. The abundant "re-sources" of the New World seemed inexhaustible and were freely available for extraction, creating a trade that boomed for the colonies and in no small part bankrolled their early success.

Unfortunately, this perspective impacted "re-sources" other than the Auk, too. The Sea Mink, an analog to the sea otter of the northern Pacific Coast, once meandered through the rocky areas of our coastal waterways.

Their dense, warm fur and relatively large body sizes compared with the American Mink demanded exorbitant prices in the fur trade. By the mid-1800s, the Sea Mink was rare and soon after extinct. Later in the 1800s, the Labrador Duck experienced a similar demise but for the art and fashion of feathering caps. At about the same time, the Heath Hen was erased from the coastal mainland due to overharvest for human consumption. It persisted for five decades as an isolated population on Martha's Vineyard, but ultimately went extinct in 1932.



American Mink (credit: Kary Nieuwenhuis)

The Dough-Bird, a large sandpiper better known today as the Northern Curlew, reportedly blacked out skies during its impressive annual migrations. In 1912, Edward Howe Forbush, Massachusetts State Ornithologist wrote: "Mr. Elbridge Gerry tells me that about 1,872 Dough-birds came in a great flight to Cape Cod and Nantucket. They 'were everywhere' and were killed in such numbers on the Cape that the boys offered them for sale at six cents each. Two market hunters killed three hundred dollars worth at that time." By my calculation, \$300 earned at six cents each makes 5,000 dead birds per "market hunter" per day. Today the Northern Curlew has not been seen in decades and has the foreboding classification of "probably extinct." For now, we can only hope for its reappearance.

EXTIRPATION



Fisher

Fortunately, extinction is not the only story of Cape Cod's wildlife. Ecologists draw an important distinction between extinction and "extirpation." Extinction is permanent, while extirpation need not be.

In the case of extirpation, a species has been lost locally but can still be found elsewhere in its natural range. Extinct are the Great Auk, Sea Mink, and Labrador Duck. Extirpated from Massachusetts are the Elk, Bison, Mountain Lion, and other creatures that once ranged much more broadly across North America.



Osprey (credit: Eric Carlson)

The first Cape Cod wildlife to experience extirpation may have been the Black Bear, Mountain Lion, Wolf, and Bobcat, whose opportunistic feeding and intimidating features were perceived as threatening to the colonial lifestyle.

Bounties were placed on their heads almost as soon as settlers arrived. Fur-bearing mammals like Beaver, Otter, Fisher, and American Mink were probably some of the others first to go. But the fact that these species found refuge in less populated, often more northern areas of their natural range, provided at least the potential they would return. And return many did.

RETURN



The real story of Cape Cod's wildlife is hopeful. It is one of temporary extirpation followed by return. Fisher "cats" had vanished from New England over a century before their reintroduction to northern states in the 1950s. They

returned to Cape Cod 18 years ago. Turkeys were absent from our State by 1851 but were reintroduced to Cape Cod in 1989. In the mid-1900s, Osprey had virtually vanished due to the ravages of DDT. By the early 80s, they occupied several nesting sites scattered all across the Cape. In 1975, the film *Jaws* hit the box office, conjuring a deep-seated fear of sharks at a time when they and their favorite prey, seals, had been all but clubbed off the Cape Cod map.

Within a human lifetime, the dramatic return of wildlife has changed our everyday lives. Lekking Turkeys regularly cause traffic jams. Osprey nesting poles – and occupied ones at that – are nearly everywhere you look. Seals abound on shore and sea and our beaches have been ominously, yet seriously posted with *Jaw*-inspiring signage: Beware of Great White Sharks. Not only has wildlife returned, it seems we're learning to live with it at last.



Perhaps the most intriguing part of this story is to think of what's to return next. Wolves seem unlikely, though coyotes arrived in Cape Cod for the first time around 1985, having acquired a preponderance of wolf

genes along their way. As of 2020, Bald Eagles were back in small numbers; time will tell whether they're here to stay. Just this year a Bobcat was confirmed in Wellfleet, unfortunately deceased on the side of the road. But more would seem inevitable. And let's not forget 2012, the year a Black Bear spent two weeks traversing the Cape, before being hauled back to the mainland. With another young male bear lingering on the other side of the Canal much of this past spring, my guess is that their return, like that of the bobcat's, is simply a matter of time.

Even with this new knowledge of the history of Cape Cod wildlife, I find it difficult to grasp just how dramatically and recently these changes have occurred. Though we have permanently lost the chance to enjoy "penguins" and "sea otters" bobbing along our coast, the wildlife community today is richer than it has been in hundreds of years. The best part - not only are we learning to live with it, but we seem to appreciate it. If we keep up the good work, who knows what the future holds?

Engaging with Nature through the Magic of the Arts

Mark Kesling, DCLT Advisor & daVinci Pursuit CEO



Mark leads an observation workshop at Grassy Pond Conservation Area

My own educational journey provided the major impetus for me to enter the field of education, to found The daVinci Pursuit, and now to be working with the Trust. From a very young age, I thoroughly enjoyed being able to explore and eventually make sense of the world around me. I spent hours outdoors playing in our urban neighborhood and hiking while visiting my grandparents in the woods and mountains. I was curious and spent hours watching someone repair a device, build something out of wood, or just watch my grandmother cook. These informal learning environments led naturally to my love of learning outside the school environment. These experiences caused me to ask questions and then try to answer the questions these informal experiences prompted. I found that when learning began with my own questions, I was able to engage more fully and eventually to explore areas I didn't know were related. I also loved creating with my hands and drawing, sketching, painting what I saw either in the world or my mind's eye.

I was and still am passionate about learning, which led me to become a professional educator with a desire to engage others in powerful learning environments

designed to spark creativity, inquiry, and enthusiasm about some idea or phenomenon. It is my belief, after several decades of teaching in a variety of educational settings, that great educators are individuals who create effective learning environments. I firmly believe that it is the environment and a learner's own passion that provide the fuel for learning. Through the manipulation of the environment, effective educators can deliver essential content and new ideas in ways that mirror the way we naturally learn.

This year, I started leading a series of art-science walks and workshops with the DCLT. During these walks, I try to inspire participants to look not only with their eyes but with all their senses. I encourage them to move, make music, write poetry, and use the visual arts to experience what they are sensing. I listen to each person and then try to develop the proper experience conducive to learning that is unique to each learner. Many educators question this approach and wonder how unique learning experiences can be created for individuals in a group setting outside the traditional classroom. When an educator leaves the role of provider of information and content, to a facilitator of learning,



Mark leads a sketching workshop at Bass River Park

students can be motivated, independent learners capable of discovering not only the content we intended to provide but much more from their own motivations and experiences.



Field sketch by Linda Blake

I believe it is the role of education and educators to kindle the curiosity of learners by helping them discover the pleasure of understanding, the preparation and stimulation for further study, and the satisfaction of

becoming adept in the processes of the hand and the brain. When education is successful, it enriches the learner's individual life.

In 2009, I founded The daVinci Pursuit to bring together artists, scientists, and community members in unique interactions and conversations. Through an integration of the arts, education, quality of life, and culture we build unique programs and experiences that create interactions and interpretive experiences with nature. Our efforts include the development of conversations, installations, provocations, and programs, that enable learners to create a stronger sense of place in our neighborhoods and communities. The issues confronting communities are complex and require creative and innovative solutions. Often communities suffer from a lack of individual self-efficacy and self-esteem; the lack of a history of working and communicating with others, especially outsiders; the identification and utilization of community assets for the greater good; and the means to create opportunities for economic development and well-being. The daVinci Pursuit catalyzes individuals in each community to create innovative visions that mobilize others, while attracting larger community-wide investment, and providing a framework for creative solutions.

I encourage you to participate in one of our walks and discover the magic of the arts to help you better experience and ultimately understand the world around you.

A Look Back

DENNIS CONSERVATION CELEBRATION

Save the Date: April 27, 2024

ANNUAL

Save the Date



2023 Events

ANNUAL AUCTION

Save the Date: July 21, 2024

ANNUAL DUCK RACE

Save the Date: September 22, 2024



New Trustees and Advisors



Christine Eosco, Trustee

Chris is a resident of South Dennis and was nominated to the role of Trustee in late 2022. She brings 25 years of executive experience in the banking industry, including global roles on three continents. Chris formerly sat on both the executive and grant committees of the United Way Board for Cape Cod & Islands and serves as the Board Treasurer for the Cape Cod Theatre Company. She volunteers as a career coach for “We Can,” a not-for-profit organization helping women reenter the workforce. At DCLT, Chris serves on the Finance Committee, at times in person and at others, from her second home in Italy.



Ann Risso, Trustee

Ann has volunteered with the Trust since 2022 and splits her time between Lincoln, MA and Dennis Village. She joins us after a successful career as an attorney for The Nature Conservancy, where she focused on real estate transactions for the New England states. As a volunteer for the Trust, Ann has been actively involved in land stewardship and community science activities, including water quality sampling and locating vernal pools. Now a Trustee, Ann serves on DCLT’s Community Science, Land, and Compliance Committees. In her spare time, Ann enjoys travel, gardening, back country hiking and camping, and spending time with her husband and children.



John Bujalski, Advisor

John is a resident of Dennis Village but grew up in Chicago and attended the University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine. He interned at Rowley Memorial Animal Hospital in Springfield, MA, where he met his wife, Diane. In June of 2020, John retired from his own veterinary practice and he and his wife moved into their Cape home, which they have owned for 20 years. In addition to his love of animals, John enjoys baseball and describes himself as a die-hard Cubs fan. After attending the DCLT’s Auction, John decided that he would like to get involved in giving back to preserve the Dennis community. At DCLT, John participates in the Membership and Community Science Committees and helps with science projects being done by DCLT interns and students.preserve the Dennis community.



Molly Gedutis , Advisor

Molly is currently in the 12th grade at Dennis-Yarmouth Regional High School. She participated in DCLT’s summer science fair internship program in 2023, choosing to study mosquito control and public health. Molly is actively involved in DCLT’s Community Science and Communications Committees. Outside the lab and classroom, while she is not applying to college and scholarships, Molly enjoys serving as the School’s Drum Major, reading, and learning to speak German.



Mark Kesling, Advisor

Mark relocated to Dennis from Indianapolis in 2021, where he currently runs his nonprofit, The daVinci Pursuit, and remotely teaches an Urban Ecology course for Butler University. He has a background in Elementary and Art Education and has worked extensively with science museums. Mark serves on the DCLT’s Community Science and Communications Committees. In his spare time, Mark enjoys photography, leading walks and workshops with DCLT, and volunteering for IFAW.



Sarah Rothermel, Advisor

Sarah grew up in New Jersey but spent her summers in East Dennis. Her family has owned a home on Sesuit Neck since the early 1960s and she became a full-time resident of Dennis in 2016. Sarah joins us after a successful career as a corporate attorney for WilmerHale. She now serves on DCLT’s Communications Committee and further serves on the Board of the Sesuit Neck Property Owners Association. In her free time, Sarah enjoys reading, swimming, gardening, and taking walks in the great outdoors.

Acknowledgements

November 1, 2022 to October 31, 2023

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