

CACIWC Celebrates its 50th Anniversary at our Annual Meeting and Environmental Conference held on November 16, 2024



Keynote speaker Jason White, PhD. Photo by Jeff Mills.

The CACIWC Board of Directors again extends their appreciation to all our members and other attendees who were able to participate in our **47th Annual Meeting and Environmental Conference**. This conference, held on Saturday, November

16, 2024, was our second conference hosted at the spacious, **Bristol Event Center** in Bristol, Connecticut. The conference theme, “*Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of CACIWC*” not only acknowledged our five decades of efforts in the support of our member commissions but was also the focus of our keynote speaker presentations.

For our special 50th anniversary conference we recruited three keynote speakers, and were pleased to welcome **retired Judge Marshall Berger, Jr., State Representative Mary Mushinsky, and Director of the Connecticut Agriculture Experiment Station (CAES), Jason White, PhD** to our keynote panel session. All three helped us review the five decades of progress in environmental regulation, conservation, and habitat protection since CACIWC was first organized. Each presenter also provided their personal

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Planning and Zoning “Due Consideration” Referral Issues

[Editor’s note: the following is a portion of Judge Marshall Berger’s keynote presentation speech given at the CACIWC 50th anniversary conference on November 16, 2024. Additional portions will be submitted in upcoming editions of The Habitat.]



Keynote speaker Judge Marshall Berger. Photo by Jeff Mills.

For approximately 25 years inland wetland agencies have been receiving applications from other land use commissions if the land involved includes inland wetlands or watercourses. General Statutes § 8–26(e) provides in relevant part: “If an application involves land regulated as an inland wetland or watercourse under the

provisions of chapter 440,1 the applicant shall submit an application to the agency responsible for administration of the inland wetlands regulations no later than the day the application is filed for the subdivision or resubdivision. . . The commission shall not render a decision until the inland wetland agency has submitted a report with its final decision to the commission. In making its decision the commission shall give due consideration to the report of the inland wetlands agency and if the commission establishes terms and conditions for approval that are not consistent with the final decision of the inland wetlands agency, the commission shall state on the record the reason for such terms and conditions.”

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CACIWC News

As this Spring issue of *The Habitat* is being prepared for posting, the CACIWC Board of Directors is continuing to receive positive comments on our 2024 annual conference, the **47th Annual Meeting and Environmental Conference** with its special theme of *Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of CACIWC*. We recognized that reviewing the five decades of CACIWC history would inspire memories of the many conferences and other programs that we provided through the years. Many of these memories reflected on the incredible efforts made by the thousands of dedicated volunteer commissioners and staff that have served our towns throughout the state. As we enter our next decade of service to our conservation and inland wetlands commission members, we pledge to continue to bring you the most current and relevant educational topics at both our annual conferences and in additional mid-year seminars that we are planning for our members.

Unfortunately, the joyful reflection and excitement from both looking back and looking forward following our 50th anniversary celebration have been tempered by news from Washington of the continuing rollback of federal programs and regulations supporting conservation and environmental protection. We recognize that these unfortunate setbacks will result in a transfer of responsibility of conservation and environmental protection efforts to state agencies and local commissions. Efforts to continue to assess the course of climate change and strengthen climate impact resilience will even more likely to fall to state and local agencies. All these policy change impacts will be exasperated by staff and funding reductions at key federal agencies such as the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

CACIWC also recognizes the critical need to continue supporting to our many member commissions as you increase your efforts to protect the critical habitats of your towns. We pledge to continue to serve you through the challenges of these coming years.

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insight within their fields of law, regulation, and science on how commissions can prepare for future efforts impacted by changes in climate, regulation and other challenges.

Dr. Jason White was the first keynote speaker of the panel to present following the welcome and annual business meeting by CACIWC President Alan Siniscalchi.

Dr. White is the Director of the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station (CAES), the oldest Agricultural Experiment Station in the country. In addition to managing the agency budget of \$12.5 million and approximately 100 scientific staff, Dr. White oversees a research program of \$5.1 million in competitive funding/research. He also serves as the Managing Editor for the *International Journal of Phytoremediation* and sits on the editorial boards of *Environmental Pollution and NanoImpact* as well as the Editorial Advisory Boards of *Environmental Science & Technology* and *Environmental Science & Technology Letters*. Dr. White is the Immediate Past President of the International Phytotechnology Society. His primary research program focuses food safety and security, with specific interests on the impact of nanomaterials on agricultural plants and on the use of nanotechnology to sustainably increase food production and promote global food security.

Dr. White received his PhD in Environmental Toxicology from Cornell University in 1997 and has secondary appointments at the Harvard University TH Chan School of Public Health, the University of Texas-El Paso, the University of Massachusetts, and Post University. He has published approximately 240 scientific papers that have been cited 11,991 times, as well as

authoring eight book chapters. Jason lives in Prospect, Connecticut with his wife Michelle and six children.

Dr. White is preparing a summary of his presentation as an article, which will be found the next issue of *The Habitat*.

Our second keynote speaker **Judge Marshall Berger** graduated from the University of Vermont with a BA degree in 1969 and from George Washington University in 1972 with a JD with honors. He was appointed a Superior Court Judge in September 1988 and has served in a variety of capacities. Most notably Judge Berger created and served as the Presiding Judge for the Land Use Docket from 2012 to 2020.

Prior to his elevation to the bench, he practiced environmental, land use, and municipal law. He served as Chief Counsel for the Department of Environmental Protection's Office of General Counsel, Air Compliance Unit.

Judge Berger taught land use law as an adjunct faculty member at the University of Connecticut School of Law from 1987 to 1994 and over the years has served on several judicial and governmental task forces. In 2009, he received the President's Award for Excellence from the Hartford County Bar Association.

Judge Berger prepared a summary of the first portion of his presentation, which can be found starting on the lower half of the cover page of this issue. He also plans to prepare addition articles for *The Habitat*.

The third member of the keynote speaker panel was **State Representative Mary Mushinsky**

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Keynote speaker Representative Mary Mushinsky*

Mary Mushinsky was first elected to the Connecticut House of Representatives in 1980 on a platform of environmental

activism, consumer advocacy and improved energy policies. She currently holds the leadership position of Assistant Deputy Speaker Pro Tempore.

Mary has held various other leadership positions including co-chair of the legislature's bipartisan Program Review and Investigations Committee, specializing in preparing workforce for a changing economy, retraining older and long-term unemployed workers, apprenticeships, and improving efficiency of state programs. The committee spotlighted and expanded the state's most successful apprenticeship program, Platform to Employment. Mary previously served as co-chair of the legislature's Select Committee on Children for ten years and passed the state's anti-bullying law. She is the recipient of numerous awards for adolescent pregnancy prevention and reduction of child poverty. She also served for six years as co-chair of the legislature's Environment Committee. A biologist by training, Mary has been the chief proponent in the Connecticut legislature of major environmental legislation enacted during the 1980s and 1990s, including mandatory recycling, packaging reduction, open-space preservation, global warming mitigation and endangered species protection laws.

Mary served as a member of the Commission on Enhancing Agency Outcomes and the Results-Based Accountability Working Group to achieve greater efficiencies in taxpayer funded programs, as well as the Peak Oil Caucus to reduce the impact of high oil prices on residents and businesses. She currently serves on the Manufacturing Caucus and the Sportsmen's Caucus.

*All photos on pages 1-13 by Jeff Mills

In Wallingford, Mary initiated and serves as co-chair of the Quinnipiac River Linear Trail Advisory Committee, which works with local, state and federal officials and the community to expand the pedestrian/bicycle trail. She also served on the Wallingford Energy Conservation Commission, which promoted the energy audit and energy management recommendations now implemented by the Town of Wallingford school system. Mary is a member and legislative liaison for the Coalition for a Better Wallingford, which seeks to reduce drug and alcohol abuse.

Representative Mushinsky, who lives in Wallingford with her husband Martin J. Waters and has two adult sons, Martin and Edward Waters, will prepare an article for a future issue of *The Habitat*.

Workshops

Following the presentations from our three keynote speakers, our 2024 annual conference proceeded to our twelve workshops, organized in four tracks designed for both new and experienced conservation and inland wetlands commissions and their staff. These

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four tracks included several key focus areas: *A. Assessing and preserving our varied habitats, their wildlife & other inhabitants; B. Application evaluation, enforcement, and inland wetlands regulation; C. Increased climate resiliency and other emerging threats; and D. Helping our commissions evaluate and respond to evolving threats and other issues.*

Three workshops of interest to Connecticut commissions were scheduled in Track A, entitled, *Assessing & preserving our varied habitats, their wildlife & other inhabitants.*

The first track A workshop, **“Update on Invasive Aquatic Plants in CT including Hydrilla,”** was presented by Gregory J. Bugbee, Associate Scientist & Head, Office of Aquatic Invasive Species, Department of Environmental Science and Forestry, The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station (CAES). He introduced his workshop topic by reviewing the ecosystem and economic impacts of invasive aquatic plants, including crowding out native vegetation, harming fisheries, degrading recreation, impeding navigation, and reducing property values. He reviewed CAES vegetation surveys and illustrated findings of invasive aquatic plants starting in 2004 covering various species including both Eurasian and Variable-leaf watermilfoil, Curlyleaf pondweed, Water chestnut, and Fanwort. The highlight of his presentation concentrated on the unique strain of Hydrilla now occurs in the Connecticut River and other areas. He illustrated the visual difference between this unique CT River Hydrilla stain and Monoecious Hydrilla and reviewed demonstration projects involving dye tests and herbicide use underway by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). Greg also reviewed the various approaches to the management and mitigation of all invasive aquatic plants emphasizing the value of surveillance and prevention efforts that local commissions and staff can assist with.

The second track A workshop, **“Sharing the Landscape with Amphibians and Reptiles”** was presented by Hank Gruner, Herpetologist, Member of the Andover Conservation Commission using an informative PowerPoint prepared by him and Dennis Quinn, Owner of Quinn Ecological, LLC. The presentation started with an explanation of the unique challenges in the conservation and management of Connecticut’s 46 species of native amphibians and reptile including the



Workshop A2 speaker Hank Gruner

complexity of the life history, the strong influence of the physical and chemical factors in their environment, and the fact that a high percentage are already at the periphery of their environmental range. Much of the presentation focused the importance of stewardship in ensuring the long-term stability of many of our amphibian and reptile populations. Hank presented many useful examples of effective stewardship in action, helping to manage changing environmental conditions and support amphibian and reptile conservation.

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Downtown Danbury Streetscape
Renaissance Project

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The third track A workshop, **“Connecticut’s Second Bird Atlas”** was presented by Min T. Huang, PhD, Migratory Bird Program Leader, State of Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP). In his presentation, Dr. Huang, detailed the significant milestone of completing the second Connecticut Bird Atlas, outlining details of the many volunteers who provided data from their observations in the 601 Atlas blocks covering the entire state. The presentation reviewed some of the initial findings of various components of the atlas data including breeding surveys, point counts, and winter surveys. He pointed out how this survey documented many changes in the distribution and occurrence of species were documented since the initial 1982-86 Atlas, with some species extirpated and some new species now breeding in Connecticut. In the areas acknowledgment to the work of our member commissions, the survey found that wetlands associated species seem to be doing relatively better compared to other groups.

The presentation reviewed detailed findings useful to towns, land trusts, NGOs, and State and Federal Agencies with the information on the status of our birds in order to direct land management actions to benefit declining populations such as the 97% decrease in Ruffed Grouse breeding populations, and the 90% decrease of Eastern Meadowlark breeding populations. The presentation closed by emphasizing the importance of securing funding to implement necessary conservation actions and other steps to support findings of the Atlas.

Three workshops of interest to Connecticut commissions were also scheduled in Track B, *Application evaluation, enforcement, and inland wetlands regulation*.

The first workshop entitled **“All Things Vegetative Considered: Enforcement & Regulation,”** was presented by Janet Brooks, Attorney at Law, LLC with, and Darcy Winther, State of Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), as moderator. This workshop outlined many important approaches for both new and experiences commissioners, including: (1) how to regulate the removal of vegetation by permit, (2) how to add vegetation plantings to a permit, i.e. a vegetated buffer by specific permit condition or by adopting a regulation, (3) how to take enforcement for unpermitted removal of vegetation (cutting/clearing of brush and trees), and (4) how to

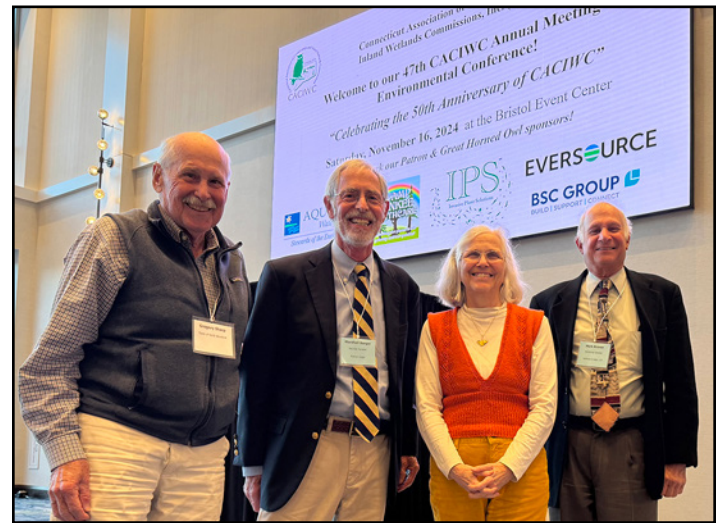
regulate the beneficial removal of invasive vegetation.

Our second track B workshop, **“2024 Wetlands Law & Regulations Update with Question & Answer Session,”** presented by Mark Branse, Halloran & Sage, LLP, Janet Brooks, Attorney at Law, LLC, and moderated

by Darcy Winther and Kristen O’Neil, Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP). One of our keynote speakers, retired Judge Marshall Berger was invited to participate in the informative and lengthy question and answer session which received a large number of questions from those in attendance.



Legal workshops speaker Attorney Janet Brooks



Legal speakers Atty. Greg Sharp, Judge Berger, Atty. Janet Brooks, Atty. Mark Branse

The third B workshop, entitled **“River Systems: Riparian Corridors & Stormwater Management”** was presented by Alicea Charamut, Executive Director, Rivers Alliance of Connecticut, Christopher R. Field, PhD, Director Office of Planning and Resilience, Department of Energy and Environmental Protection

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(DEEP), & Bianca Beland, DEEP Land and Water Resources Division. In the first portion of the workshop,



Atty. Mark Branse and Judge Marshall Berger

Alicea Charamut reviewed the functions and value of riparian zones in protecting water quality and aquatic habitats, along with helping to mitigate the impact of storms. She compared buffers and upland review areas including differences in buffers and setbacks among New England states along with the role of local land use agencies in protection of these critical areas. The second portion of the workshop reviewed and illustrat-

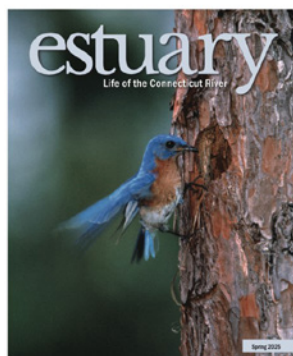
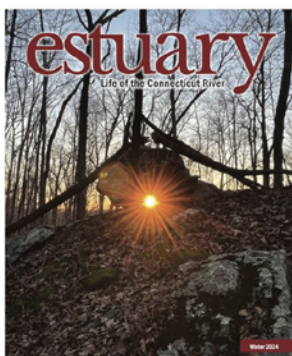
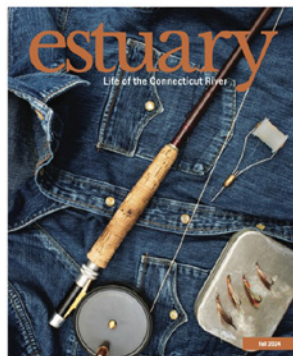
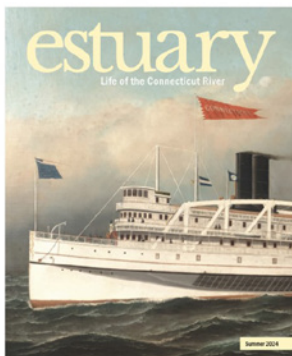
ed how Connecticut state agencies are continuing their efforts to improve management of stormwater as our state experiences increasing numbers of extreme rainfall events driven by climate change and other factors. Dr. Field reviewed opportunities for towns to access federal climate resilience funding to keep communities safe from these events, while Bianca Beland provided an illustrated presentation on the historic impacts of the catastrophic flooding event observed in southwestern Connecticut towns in August 2024.

Three workshops of interest to conservation commissions were scheduled in Track C. *Increased climate resiliency and other emerging threats.*

The first track C workshop, “**A Roadmap for Connecticut Climate Resilience**,” was presented by John Truscinski, Director of Resilience Planning, Connecticut Institute for Resilience and Climate Adaptation (CIRCA). In his workshop, John Truscinski reviewed how the efforts of CIRCA in working with Connecticut Coastal communities on climate resilience strategies has led to the development of a roadmap for guiding Connecticut policy makers. He outlined the various steps needed to both understanding local

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climate vulnerabilities, and the actions towns can take to prepare, mitigate and adapt will require planning for future hazards, budgeting and coordination between municipal commissions, boards and authorities.

The second track C workshop, **“Climate Change Impact on Rural and Urban Areas,”** Was presented by Louanne Cool-ey & Kayla Vargas from the Connecticut Institute of Resilience and Climate Adaptation (UConn CIRCA), along with Bill Gleason, West Hartford Tree Action Group (TAG). The speakers presented information showing the many ways that climate change is continuing to impact Connecticut and emphasize how rural and urban areas face both similar and distinctly different challenges. Louanne and Kayla reviewed how heat and flooding can be addressed using various existing tools municipalities have and may need in the future. They focused on the roles of all local authority including Zoning, Inland Wetlands Agency and Conservation Commissions. Bill Gleason outlined the unique approach that West Hartford uses with a combination of the town Tree Action Group, citizen volunteer action, and unique educational outreach programs to increase awareness of these critical issues, while improving environmental resilience, diversity, and conservation.

A third track C workshop, **“Light Pollution: Its Impact on Wildlife & Climate Change,”** benefited from the perspective of three speakers: Leo Smith, Chair of



Swamp Yankee Earthcare Exhibitor Table



BSC Group Exhibitor Table



CT Chapter Dark Sky International Exhibitor Table

the Connecticut Chapter, Dark-Sky International; Craig Repasz, Chair & Co-Founder, Lights Out Connecticut; and Margery C. B Winters, the Chair of the Simsbury Conservation Commission/ Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Agency, President, Simsbury Land Trust, and Assistant Director, Roaring Brook Nature Center. All three speakers gave their perspective on how light pollution adversely affects the health and quality of life of plants, animals and people. They focused on efforts to provide outdoor light when and where it's needed, while minimizing harm from light pollution to the highest degree reasonably possible. A portion of the workshop outlined the value of the Model Outdoor Lighting Regulations developed for Connecticut, designed to guide municipalities in reducing light pollution through their zoning amendment process. Finally, several Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)-approved streetlight technologies, were presented such as adaptive lighting, that reduce lighting levels from 11 PM until 5 AM.

Three workshops of interest to conservation commissions were scheduled in Track D. *Helping our commissions evaluate and respond to evolving threats and other issues.*

The first track D workshop entitled, **“Conducting Natural Resource Inventories,”** was presented by Hank Gruner, Herpetologist, Member of the Andover Conservation Commission, and Erik Keller, Vice Chairman, Ridgefield Conservation Commission.

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This workshop topic was requested by conservation commissions who have not yet begun work on the Natural Resource Inventory (NRI) for their town or have gone beyond their initial stages of planning. Both speakers provided valuable information insight on



Earth Tones Native Plants Exhibitor Table

their approaches throughout the NRI process, including gather initial information to develop local information, developing databases and preparing and distributing a summary report. The presentation also recognized the additional steps and resources needed to best utilize all data obtained in their NRI to effectively carry out their conservation mandate.



New England Wetlands Plants

department of Plant Science and Landscape Architecture.

In her presentation, Dr. Kutz reviewed all recent updates to the Connecticut Invasive Plant List including details on their identification and methods of control. The attendees of this workshop were pleased to learn

more about these recent additions, which were the first updates to the list since 2018. The workshop emphasized that, while the task of managing invasive plants can quickly become overwhelming due to time and resource needs, use of the triage practice to assess the degree of ecological damage to the site and economic criteria, helps prioritizes the invasive species management.



Bolton Conservation Commission Exhibit Table with Rod Parlee, Bolton CC Chair & CACIWC Board Member

The third and final track D workshop entitled, “**Identifying Potential Vernal Pools,**” by Edward Pawlak, MS, Registered Soil Scientist & Certified Professional Wetland Scientist (PWS) was another frequently requested topic as many municipalities are interested in mapping potential vernal pools as a first step in protecting and conserving these critical habitats. In his workshop, Ed effectively outlined the various challenges to these efforts He highlighted two effective strategies for remotely identifying potential vernal pools using both high- and low-technology approaches. These including use of tools available within Google Earth, which can be used to identify small, isolated water bodies on the landscape with varying degrees of reliability, depending largely on forest

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composition (deciduous versus coniferous). Several examples of how confirmed vernal pools appear on Google Earth aerial photos were presented, along with examples of "false positive" vernal pool identifications on Google Earth. A resource for identifying property lines and ownership on Google Earth was also shared. The attendees of Ed's workshop also appreciated his describing of a fascinating but low tech approach of using springtime evening "road running" to provide auditory clues to the location of vernal pools within the local landscape.

For additional details of these workshops, please note that many of the PowerPoint presentations of our speakers and workshop leaders are available on our website 2024 annual conference page at: [CACIWC Annual Meeting 2024](#).

During our 2024 conference, CACIWC hosted many nonprofit and commercial exhibitors that provide their informative displays in an easy to view arrangement between the entrance and main ballroom adjacent to the food and beverage service. Our conference survey revealed an appreciation for the information provided by these exhibits, along with the networking opportunities that occurred in these areas.

We again thank the conference attendees and all those responsible for organizing our 47th Annual Meeting and Environmental Conference. We used many of your workshop ideas in our 2024 conferences so please keep forwarding your suggestions to us at: AnnualMtg@caciwc.org. We look forward to your participation at our upcoming 2025 Annual Meeting and Environmental Conference! 🍀

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The same referral applies to site plans; 8-3(g)(1); and special permits; 8-3c(a) and (b).

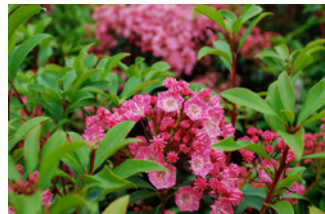
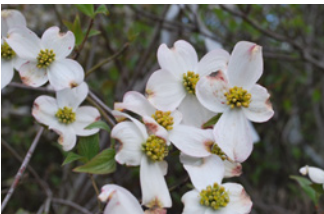
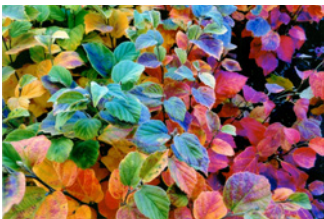
The referral process makes sense as our land use commissions should give due consideration to sister commission reviews. But here is the part you may not be familiar with. In a 2005 Connecticut Supreme Court decision, *Carr v. Planning & Zoning Comm'n of Town of Bridgewater*, 273 Conn. 573 (2005), in which the zoning commission denied an affordable housing application based upon the inland wetlands commission's denial of its application, the court said, "This court previously has stated that this statutory provision 'recognizes that, as a practical matter, a wetlands agency's determination that the construction of a subdivision would have an adverse effect on the wetlands does not necessarily render the subdivision infeasible. A [planning] commission could determine, for example, that the subdivision application should be modified to avoid any such adverse effect. Moreover, the statutory provision vests discretion in the commission to determine that, even if the adverse effects cannot be avoided, they do not justify denial of the subdivision. Thus, the statute effectively gives the commission discretionary authority to contravene the

agency's decisions. Again, this makes sense in light of the fact that the risk of damage to wetland areas does not necessarily render a subdivision plan practically infeasible, but may merely present a public policy concern.' *River Bend Associates, Inc. v. Planning Commission*, 271 Conn. 41, 62, 856 A.2d 959 (2004). It is clear, therefore, that the report of a conservation commission is not binding on a planning and zoning commission in considering a subdivision application." *Carr*, 273 Conn. 573, 597-98.

The Carr court also stated "As we have indicated, contrary to the zoning commission's statement to the trial court, the report of a conservation commission is not binding on a planning and zoning commission in reaching a decision on an ordinary subdivision application. Rather, a planning and zoning commission need only give "due consideration" to a conservation commission's report. See General Statutes § 8-26. A fortiori, the report of a conservation commission is not binding on a planning and zoning commission in the affordable housing context, where the burden is on the planning and zoning commission to weigh the potential harm to the wetlands against the town's need for affordable housing and to provide persuasive legal

consideration, continued on page 12

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and policy reasons that the subdivision application should be denied. . . . The record in the present case shows that the zoning commission . . . simply assumed that a determination by the conservation commission that a subdivision has the potential to cause damage to wetlands always outweighs the need for affordable housing. Accordingly, we conclude that . . . the conservation commission's denial of the wetlands application was not a valid reason for denying the modified application." Carr, 273 Conn. 573, 599–600.

So much for a cohesive land use planning scheme as envisioned by the legislature. The Court has emphasized that our land use commissions are independent statutory bodies. Of course, the independence goes both ways and an inland wetland commission has its own regulatory function to determine impacts on wetlands and watercourses. See, *Aaron v. Conservation Comm'n of Town of Redding*, 183 Conn. 532, 552 (1981) ("That [inland wetland and watercourse] agency 'shall serve as the sole agent for the licensing of regulated activities,' (emphasis added) as that term is defined under the Inland Wetlands and Water Courses Act. See General Statutes 22a-42(c); 22a-38(13).")

Nevertheless, we are now facing the tension between two equally important state policies, sometimes in conflict with each other: the protection of our wetlands vs supplying more affordable housing. With proper planning and collaboration, however, there need be no conflict. Of course, a wetlands and watercourses commission is, at the moment, not a commission that falls under the purview of the 8-30g Affordable Housing legislation. Yet, our wetland commissions must comply with first, judicial decisions requiring an administrative decision be based upon findings of an adverse impact (or no impact) to the wetlands or watercourses, which are supported by substantial evidence in the record. See, *River Bend Associates, Inc. v. Conservation & Inland Wetlands Comm'n of Town of Simsbury*, 269 Conn. 57, 70 (2004) ("the substantial evidence test requires a substantial basis in fact that an adverse impact to the wetlands or watercourses will result from the proposed activities and that the defendant's decision must be supported by more than a possibility of that adverse impact."). Second, the commission de-

cision must also comply with the legislative mandate of 22a-42a(d)(1) to "state upon the record the reason for its decision." Failure to do so, which has been, for some commissions, a calculated determination in the past, will result in a precarious decision subject to being reversed. How long courts will continue to give a pass on this failure - especially in light of the public policy tension - is questionable. Nevertheless, if there are cogent reasons for your actions protecting those water resources, they must be set forth for both the public and the reviewing court.

Judge Marshall Berger (Ret), formerly the Presiding Judge of the Connecticut Superior Court Land Use Docket, is now a member of the Alternative Dispute Resolution group at Pullman and Comley offering mediation and other resolution opportunities to parties engaged in land use and environmental disputes.

Look for additional articles by Judge Berger in upcoming editions of *The Habitat*. 🌿

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In other news:

1. During the past few months, the CACIWC Board of Directors and its Annual Meeting Committee have reviewed the many comments and suggestions submitted as part of our 2024 conference evaluation. In response to these suggestions, we are beginning to select workshop topics and speakers for our **48th Annual Meeting and Environmental Conference**, now scheduled on **Saturday, November 15, 2025**. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any additional suggestions for speakers and workshops to schedule during this conference at AnnualMtg@caciwc.org. Watch our website for the additional detailed conference news at www.caciwc.org.

2. Although expenses for our conference and publication have continued to grow, the Board of Directors have decided not to increase our **CACIWC membership dues for our 2025-26 fiscal year** starting on July 1, 2025 to help limit your yearly expenses. We will again offer a substantial discount on the annual conference registration fee for our member commissioners. Members will also be able to attend our mid-year training programs being scheduled this year. Watch for our reminders or look for both the 2025-26 online and mail-in membership renewal forms on our website: www.caciwc.org.

3. As part of last year's 50th anniversary of CACIWC and our publication, we asked conference attendees

to also add **topic suggestions for articles in *The Habitat*** in the conference evaluation form. You can also send us ideas for content in *The Habitat* to us via email, at: TheHabitat@caciwc.org or at board@caciwc.org. We will appreciate all your suggestions!



CACIWC President Alan Siniscalchi introducing the conference

4. All of us on the CACIWC board were saddened by the recent death

of Ann Beaudin, our long-term Hartford County Representative to our board. Board members could always depend on Ann to discuss how best to raise awareness of the latest emerging environmental issues impacting communities throughout Connecticut. To help honor her love of CACIWC, her daughter Dr. Andrea Beaudin has asked us to establish the **Ann Beaudin Memorial Fund** to continue Ann's efforts in provide education and training for our members. Please see the article on the back cover of this issue (p. 16) for additional details.

All of us on the CACIWC Board of Directors continue to thank you and your fellow commissioners and staff for your local efforts and your ongoing support. We pledge to help all of you continue your important efforts during the ongoing reductions in federal programs and regulations supporting conservation, environmental protection, and building resilience to the impact of climate change.

Thank you,
Alan J. Siniscalchi, President
CACIWC 🍁

An advertisement for 'The Pond And Lake Connection' featuring a large amphibious machine in a wetland. The machine has 'THE POND AND LAKE CONNECTION' and 'WETLAND & COASTAL INVASIVE SPECIES CONTROL SPECIALIST' written on its side. The background is a mix of orange and black.

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Remembering Tom O'Dell

No discussion of our 50th Anniversary would be complete without acknowledging the many contributions made by CACIWC co-founder **Tom O'Dell**. In addition to serving as our President and Executive Director, Tom's long service as Editor of this publication continued until close to his death in 2018.

Thomas M. O'Dell was born on July 27, 1934 in Port Washington, New York and graduated from Glastonbury



Former CACIWC President Tom O'Dell

High School and the University of Connecticut, where he majored in Forest Entomology. After fighting western forest fires,

serving as an Army National Guard medic, and a forty plus year career studying biological control of insect pests with the USDA Forest Service in Hamden, Tom retired to spend more time on state and local conservation efforts.

Tom's early efforts as editor began in 1970 when, as a new member of the Westbrook Conservation Commission, he volunteered to assist in researching and developing content for the newsletter of Connecticut Association of Conservation Commissions (CACC), entitled, *Connecticut's Environment*. This CACC newsletter was first printed by the State of Connecticut Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources for distribution throughout the state. In 1971, when most state conservation and environmental protection activities were transferred to the newly formed Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), CACC and its newsletter continued to be supported along with publication of the first *Handbook for Conservation Commissions*.

Major changes occurred with the passage of the 1972 Inland Wetlands and Watercourse Act creating a new municipal government function, followed by Public Act 73-293, which increased the size of conservation commissions. Following the passages of these acts and within four years of the first Earth Day, the **Connecticut Association of Conservation and Inland Wetlands Commissions (CACIWC)** was organized in to help support the major expansion of municipal land use roles and responsibilities.

CACIWC published the first issue of *The Habitat* in 1974 with Tom as its Interim Editor. *The Habitat* received financial support from the DEP until 1993 with several others periodically helping as supporting and interim editors. In 1994, Tom again accepted the position as Editor following his retirement from the USDA Forest Service.

For the next 22 years Editor Tom, and Associate Editor Ann Letendre expanded and strengthened *The Habitat*. In 2006, the CACIWC Board of Directors supported the further expansion of newsletter, with stable advertising revenue support organized by Jeff Mills of JM Communications. *The Habitat* is now a major tool of the CACIWC education and outreach triad, along with our annual conference and our www.caciwc.org website. In 2007 Tom stepped down as President to focus on his role as Editor of *The Habitat*. That fall he was awarded the **2007 Special Recognition Award** to acknowledge his many years of contributions to CACIWC and our members.

On Thursday, October 13, 2016, Tom O'Dell was honored for his statewide work and 46 years as Westport Conservation Commission Chairman at special ceremony held at Westport's Water's Edge Resort & Spa. CACIWC President Alan Siniscalchi presented Tom with his **2016 Lifetime Achievement award** at this ceremony for his for his many decades of service to the Conservation and Inland Wetland Commissions of Connecticut as the CACIWC President, Executive Director, and Editor of *The Habitat* along with his tireless advocacy work for open space conservation as



Former CACIWC President Tom O'Dell. Photo by Carol O'Dell.

one of the lead environmental champions in Connecticut. Other announcements made during this event include the recent designation by the Town of Westbrook of the "Tom O'Dell Wildlife and Conservation Area" for an area of Long Island Sound including the three barrier islands known as Salt, Menunketesuck, and Duck.

As we celebrate the 50th Anniversary of CACIWC and *The Habitat*, we once again remember Tom and acknowledge how his many contributions will continue to serve as the foundation of CACIWC for decades to come. 🌿

CT State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP)

Public Review Draft Available this Summer

Since our last update, the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) has continued to gather information from taxonomic experts, CT municipal and tribal communities, and other key partners such as CACIWC to inform the development of Connecticut's 2025 Wildlife Action Plan. The upcoming issue CT Wildlife Action Plan's *Partner Network Newsletter* will summarize the results of a recent survey focused on habitats, issues and actions. Thank you to those who filled out the survey! The input you provided throughout the revision process has helped sharpen the focus on top priorities for each of the chapters in the CT SWAP.

DEEP is well on its way to finalizing the public review draft and will again be seeking input from CACIWC members. The public review period will be a minimum of 30 days starting this summer and CACIWC will be providing you with information on the com-

ment process. Please make time in your schedule to provide feedback! Information about Connecticut's Wildlife Action Plan as well as updates about the 2025 revision can be found at [CT Wildlife Action Plan](#).

Since the launch of the revision process in 2023, DEEP has been in contact with CACIWC for input and assistance on reaching out to our members. The intention is that this collaboration will continue into implementation of the Plan. President Alan Siniscalchi has been meeting with Brian Hess and other representatives of DEEP's Wildlife Division to discuss specific ways CACIWC can work closely with DEEP and other key conservation partners on implementation of the 2025 Wildlife Action Plan over the next 10 years. This is an exciting opportunity to work together to develop a strategy and tactics for achieving our shared conservation goals.

Stay tuned for additional information! 🍁



We thank the many generous businesses and organizations who sponsored our 2024 Annual Meeting and Annual Conference!



Janet P. Brooks, Attorney at Law, LLC





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The Ann Beaudin Memorial Fund

The CACIWC Board of Directors is saddened to report the recent passing of one of our long-term board members, Ann Beaudin, who had served as our Hartford County board representative since 2007. Ann's skills as an effective advocate for local and statewide open space conservation and habitat protection were developed through her multiple careers in public school education, communication, marketing and advocacy. The CACIWC board certainly will miss her passionate dedication to raising awareness of the latest environmental issue in her county and throughout the state.

In addition to her role on the CACIWC board, she also served for many years as the Chair of the Windsor Conservation Commission. Read her obituary for additional insight on her active life: [Ann Beaudin obituary](#).

Her daughter Andrea requested that CACIWC set up a memorial fund to honor Ann's long service in promoting habitat conservation and environmental protection within Connecticut. Contributions to this fund will support environmental and conservation educa-

tion for Connecticut's many conservation and inland wetlands commissioners and other volunteers. Please consider donating in Ann's memory using the following PayPal form, located at: [Donate](#). 🍁



Please save the date of Saturday, November 15, 2025 for our next *Annual Meeting and Annual Conference* and watch our website for additional updates: www.caciwc.org.