



Why West Haven Won Audubon's "Share the Shore Award"

Their entire shoreline is open to the public, but this Connecticut community has dedicated nearly two decades of work to ensure birds and people both get their time in the sun.

Let's take a look back at some of the amazing work led by city officials and local volunteers.

2003 | Sandy Point is recognized as an Important Bird Area

West Haven residents Lee and Marion Aimsbury nominated, and Audubon Connecticut recognized, Sandy Point as an Important Bird Area, critical to nesting Piping Plovers, Least Terns, and American Oystercatchers, hundreds of migrating Semipalmated Sandpiper, and a large variety of other shorebirds and waterfowl.

2005 | The City takes notice and begins making improvements

Officials from the City first become aware of this gem and begin taking baby steps to improve the site for birds and residents. West Haven Director of Parks Mark Paine Jr. notes, "We started with the smaller, manageable projects while remaining conscious of larger projects so that when resources became available, we could act!"

2009 | New tide gates for Old Field Creek improve foraging habitat for birds downstream

Working with the CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), Department of Transportation, and the Environmental Protection Agency, the City replaces the tide gates on Old Field Creek, allowing saltwater to flow into the marsh upstream of the tide gate, in turn improving foraging habitat for birds downstream.

2011 and 2012 | Hurricane Irene and Superstorm Sandy bring the community together

Hurricane Irene strikes West Haven, flooding the basements of residents in the vicinity of Sandy Point. In 2012, basements are flooded again by Superstorm Sandy. Residents come together, reviving the West Haven Watershed Restoration Committee to work with the City to apply to the Natural Resource Conservation Service's [Floodplain Easement Program](#). The Program enabled residents to leave the flood-prone areas near Old Field Creek, north and slightly west of Sandy Point.

2012 | Audubon helps identify ways that local residents can take steps to improve Sandy Point

Audubon begins work on an Important Bird Area Conservation Plan for Sandy Point. During development of the plan, Audubon reaches out to the City and the West Haven Watershed Restoration Committee. Interest in Sandy Point and the birds it supports increases.

2013 | Local residents make major improvements to the habitat at Sandy Point, creating places for birds to nest, rest, and refuel

Informed by the conservation plan, the West Haven Watershed Restoration Committee, Menunkatuck Audubon Society and the City of West Haven begin making improvements at Sandy Point, resulting in an incredibly positive ripple effect.

A dedicated group of volunteers from the Committee, led by Georgianna Jette and Ruth Garby Torres, remove invasive plants, replant salt-tolerant native species, and put in bird and butterfly gardens. The City installs a sign and kiosk and reconfigures the parking lot, adding a viewing platform and four additional raised beds. Menunkatuck Audubon Society erected 8 osprey platforms in the vicinity of Sandy Point from early 2015 to late 2016.

“In 2013, we put out a call for volunteers to do 'Be a Good Egg' educational outreach at Sandy Point, showing beachgoers what they could do to help Piping Plovers and American Oystercatchers (like staying a safe distance from nesting birds and chicks). The City of West Haven provided space for volunteer training and local resident Carol Soter offered up her garage for storing materials between tabling sessions”, says Corrie Folsom-O’Keefe, Director of Bird Conservation for Audubon Connecticut. “A lot of the volunteers were local residents and the effort was so successful that after two years, the bulk of Sandy Point visitors had learned about how to protect these vulnerable species.”

2016 | Local students hired to help educate the public as official bird monitors

In partnership with the City, West Haven High School, the WHWRC, Menunkatuck Audubon Society, and the Roger Tory Peterson Institute, the Audubon Wildlife Guards program expands to West Haven. The program gives local high school students the opportunity to gain experience and work in the field of conservation as Sandy Point’s official beach-nesting bird monitors.

2018 | Scouts and additional residents join the efforts to remove invasive plants at Sandy Point

Eagle Scouts Connor and Aidan Lynch complete projects at Sandy Point, removing invasive plants and replacing them with native plants that benefit birds and other wildlife in the area. Second Ave residents also take an interest in Sandy Point and begin working to eradicate invasive Japanese knotweed along Beach St.

2020 | The City listens to the local community when changes are required to Beach Street

The City held a public meeting at Sandy Point in Dec 2020 to get input from the community on plans to elevate Beach Street. Local residents had concerns about the proposed height and in response the City is working to revise the design for the road project so that it provides a reasonable level of flood protection while reducing the overall height so that it is more in scale with the natural waterfront in this area.

“The transformation of the Sandy Point area and the community morale has been incredible,” said City of West Haven Director of Parks Mark Paine Jr. *“It has given a huge jolt of positive energy to the community. Birders, beachgoers, fishermen, and neighbors all enjoy the sanctuary and have formed a friendlier community at a place that was once subject to excessive litter and unwelcomed activity.”*

2021 | Volunteers and Wildlife Guards jump back into action after COVID

This spring, volunteers are hard at work maintaining the gardens in the parking area and assisting with the stewardship of the Piping Plover and American Oystercatcher. A training for new Piping Plover monitors was held at Sandy Point on May 1st by DEEP Wildlife Biologist Laura Saucier, technician Rebecca Foster, and Audubon Alliance for Coastal Waterbirds’ Volunteer Coordinator, Scott Kruitbosch. The Wildlife Guards will head back to Sandy Point this summer, where you will find them at information tables and on the beach monitoring nesting birds!