

# SPECIAL PLACES

FOR MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS OF THE TRUSTEES

## Mission Accomplished

*Steep Hill is finally protected*



trustees





# MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

## Protecting the remaining Crane Estate lands

BY WAYNE WILKINS

*“What? There’s land that could still be developed on the Crane Estate? Isn’t it all conservation land already?”*

*“Do you mean part of Crane Beach could become private and inaccessible?”*

A few of the questions that Trustees heard when a parcel known as the Steep Hill Inholding became available earlier this year, these statements outline just how difficult and challenging the situation that presented itself was. Indeed, 20.5 acres on the Crane Estate—abutting the eastern edge of the Grand Allée, extending down the hill and including 1,000 feet of frontage on Crane Beach—had been held aside from the Crane family’s original 1949 donation of the Estate for their potential future use.

With no activity on this land in the many years since the gift of the Estate, most people understandably assumed there were no unprotected areas within its boundaries. Just recently, however, the Crane’s descendants decided that it was finally time to sell the land, and—thanks in no small part to the positive relationship maintained by Trustees staff over nearly seven decades—the family offered the organization the opportunity to acquire the parcel.

### CRITICAL LANDS

Since acquiring the Estate, The Trustees has been keenly interested in protecting this inholding on Castle Hill, not only to protect

the iconic view from being marred by potential development and keep the pristine beachfront, wooded paths, and open fields intact, but for ecological reasons as well. The Steep Hill land hosts an important, natural maritime scrubland community—delineated by the state’s Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program as a BioMap2 Core habitat and designated as a priority ecological habitat by the state, as its relative isolation offers a refuge for feeding shorebirds, including endangered piping plovers. Keeping Steep Hill in its natural state would also help protect against future sea-level rise at the Crane Estate; its large boulders will help mitigate severe erosion that is expected to increase along coastline properties. For these reasons the parcel has long been included on The Trustees’ list of lands whose protection the organization considered critical.

### STEEP CHALLENGES

Grateful to have the opportunity to purchase and protect the land, the challenge for The Trustees would still be monumental. “The initial hurdle,” as David Santomenna, Associate Director of Land Conservation points out, “was convincing people that we





A drone camera shot of the entire Crane Estate from above the water puts the property's scale and proximity to the Grand Allée in stark perspective.

A partial view of Steep Hill's maritime scrubland, on the property's northeast side.

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The boundaries of the Steep Hill inholding abut Castle Hill's Grand Allée and cut into a significant portion of the northern end of Crane Beach. Access would be through easements on the Estate's otherwise restricted and bucolic roads.

didn't already own it." Then there was the timeframe—just four short months from the time the organization was granted the right to purchase until the late-September deadline—and the price tag of \$2.5 million. In the midst of a summer filled with special 125th Anniversary events and celebrations, it would take a true team effort and an enormous amount of focus to raise the funds necessary to complete this critical land conservation effort.

Backed by an anonymous matching challenge of \$500,000 to jumpstart the undertaking, a multi-pronged campaign was conceived, including a grassroots letter-writing and phone-calling effort to raise awareness and support. Local community members canvassed their neighbors. Site visits were arranged, including a "Ride for

Steep Hill" horseback event with members from local equestrian groups, which gave visitors the opportunity to see first-hand where development could occur and how easements would allow access roads through otherwise protected acreage.

And in the end, it worked: thanks to more than 700 donors from 199 communities across the state and even the country, The Trustees were able to raise nearly \$1.9 million toward the goal, funding the remainder through a one-time loan from its own reserves (see sidebar). The Steep Hill inholding was purchased by The Trustees on September 28, 2016, permanently protecting it from development, ensuring its long-term health, and providing access to the entire Crane Estate in perpetuity.

"The success of this land conservation milestone is a true testament to our local and statewide members, friends, and

supporters who worked together to achieve a significant goal in a short period of time," says Julie Ann Grant, Associate Director of Development. Barbara Erickson, Trustees President & CEO adds, "This acquisition is a huge win for The Trustees in protecting the important legacy of the Crane Family at this iconic National Historic Landmark. We could not have achieved this milestone without the commitment and generosity of so many donors, staff, volunteers, and community partners across the Commonwealth and beyond. We are eternally grateful."

And The Trustees are grateful, too, for the Crane family. Their leadership and inspiration in conserving land has been an extraordinary example to follow, and their generosity towards the citizens of the Commonwealth—and all who come to visit this amazing place—has been nothing short of stunning.

*To meet the remainder of the Steep Hill fundraising goal in time for the closing, The Trustees made a one-time, rare loan to itself from reserves that must be replenished. In order to do that, we are still actively fundraising and encouraging people to make gifts to the Conservation Fund, which covers a broad range of land acquisition and stewardship activities. For more information, please visit [www.thetrustees.org/steephill](http://www.thetrustees.org/steephill) or call 978.921.1944 x1815.*