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Preserving Land for Community Benefit
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ANNUAL REPORT **2018**



Preserving Land for Community Benefit

The Upper Saco Valley Land Trust is a nonprofit organization working with local landowners to permanently protect the lands and waters that define our communities and enrich our quality of life.

USVLT serves northern Carroll and western Oxford counties, including the communities of Bartlett, Jackson, Hart's Location, Conway, Albany, Madison, Eaton, Chatham, Fryeburg, Brownfield, and Denmark.

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THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIPS & COMMITMENT OF STEWARDSHIP



2018 was dynamic for the Upper Saco Valley Land Trust, across all seasons. The acquisition of the Pine Hill Community Forest in June capped one of the largest and most complex projects in USVLT's history. Art Celebrates Place moved across the border to Fryeburg Academy, where

the new venue provided a perfect backdrop for an evening of art on display and onstage, all during an April snowstorm. Building on 2017's successful Fields on the Saco event, the 2018 fall harvest dinner tripled its income (thanks to the generosity of our diners and donors!). Membership was the highest in the organization's history and we ended another year on a financial high note.

2018 also brought home a reminder about the "long road." While Pine Hill and the Ware Preserve were acquired, these transactions were really just the first step of a rich – and permanent – relationship of stewarding the land into the future. In the case of Pine Hill, that responsibility will be shared with a formal advisory committee comprised of town officials, school district staffers, and representatives from other constituencies.

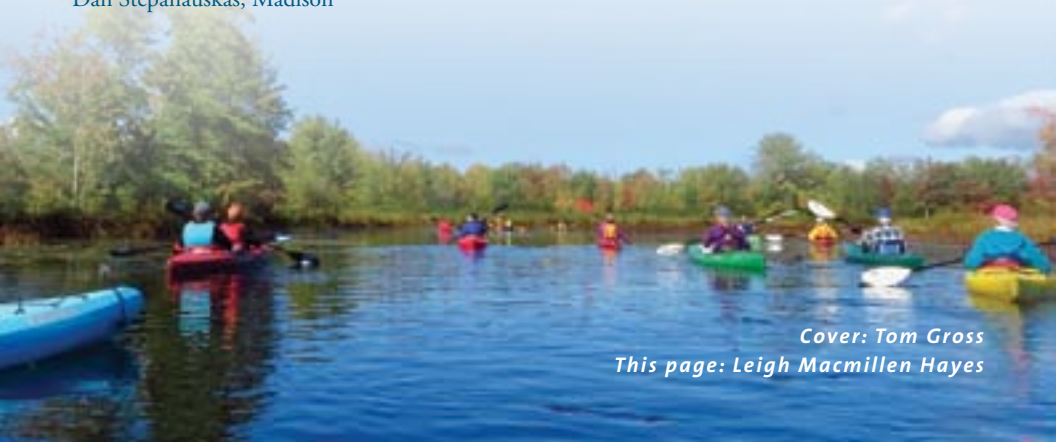
Partnerships, like that embodied in the Pine Hill Advisory Committee, have been a consistent theme during 2018. Most USVLT undertakings were partnership projects:

- With the Access Fund and Friends of the Ledges, we launched a fundraising campaign for the Secure the Ledges Initiative, bolstering awareness about public-access threats to Whitehorse and Cathedral Ledges.
- Thanks to partnerships with the Granite Backcountry Alliance and the White Mountain National Forest, historic ski trails are seeing a renaissance.
- Through our water initiative, towns are advocating for water-quality and aquifer protection ordinances.
- Together with the World Fellowship Center in Albany, we exceeded our budget goal to preserve over 400 acres in the Whitton Pond watershed (stay tuned for the completion of this project in 2019).

Your support has been critical to these stories of success, and to the growth of our organization. Thank you.

William Abbott, Executive Director

Doug Burnell, President



Cover: Tom Gross
This page: Leigh Macmillen Hayes

WINTER

WARE PRESERVE & THE MAPLE VILLA GLADES

Mountain snow arrived in November in the East Branch valley, and by year's end, a real New England winter was underway, the sort that lasts five months, start to finish. That was just fine with powder hounds, and inaugurated a new era for glade skiing on historic terrain.

The north shoulder of Bartlett Mountain in Intervale has a rich history of skiing, beginning in the mid-1930s when the Civilian Conservation Corps first cut a trail from East Branch Road behind the New England Inn to Bartlett's summit. Initially, skiers hiked up the recently established Maple Villa Trail and skied down through open glades. A few years later, the Intervale Ski Area used much of the same terrain, lift-served with the newly invented J-bar, before falling into disuse in the 1980s. The glades are now being revived through a dynamic partnership among USVLT, the White Mountain National Forest, and Granite Backcountry Alliance (GBA), a nonprofit group dedicated to backcountry skiing opportunities in northern New England.

A key objective of this partnership was the purchase of the Ware Preserve on East Branch Road, which now serves as the gateway to glade skiing upslope on the National Forest. Project costs approached \$100,000, and included the



Tyler Ray and Rick Jenkinson, past and current board members respectively, skinning up to the Glades/Jamie Walter, Powder Magazine



Winter Birch/Melanie Barash Levitt

permanent protection of 48 acres of forestland contiguous with the National Forest, as well as establishment of a parking area and trailhead, and the dedication of a financial reserve for future improvements and stewardship. Instrumental to the effort was a cadre of dedicated volunteers, providing the manpower to cut brush, clear saplings, and re-establish routes.

The project honors Richard Ware's conservation legacy. The longtime Kearsarge resident, who died in 2018, had decades earlier purchased the property with the hopes of guiding the land toward permanent protection. That initial vision has now become reality, and doubly so. While USVLT owns the property, the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests holds a perpetual conservation easement on the land. The easement also guarantees pedestrian access to the property.

Projects of this sort are possible only through the synergy and commitment of like-minded organizations, including GBA, the Connie Davis Watson Foundation, the Fields Pond Foundation, HEB Engineers, and our generous community of supporters.

Art Celebrates Place Shines in New Venue

As winter snows melted, Arts Celebrates Place ushered in spring at its new venue, the Leura Hill Eastman Performing Arts Center at Fryeburg Academy. Once again the event showcased delectable local food offerings, music, and gallery walls filled with the work of local artists from Mount Washington Valley and western Maine. Enriching the evening in 2018 was a performance by Jeanne Limmer's Axis Dance Company with student performers weaving in and around hanging silk panels, painted by Jay Rancourt.

Each year a suite of different conservation properties inspire the resulting creative efforts. The theme in 2019 is the Pine Hill Community Forest, and April 5th promises another exciting evening, with more paintings and a broader spectrum of visual and performing arts.

Words fall short when it comes to thanking the individuals who orchestrate Arts Celebrates Place, including its founders Marnie Cobbs, Lucy Gatchell, Kay Leigh Kearns and Linda Gray. Additional kudos go to Linda, who four years ago launched and has shepherded the Arts Celebrates Place Calendar. The 2019 edition of this month-by-month compilation of landscapes by local artists will be available in mid-summer.

SPRING

AQUIFER PROTECTION WORK



Conway Lake/Tom Gross

Spring is a time of loosening up and breaking free. Here in northern New England, this is an incremental process until all at once the energy is released. Long nights give way to choruses of birds, trickling icicles feed rushing rivers, green sprigs and swelling buds are lush fields and shaded forests a few weeks later.

Water epitomizes spring in many ways, from mud season to smelt runs. Water is also a critical natural resource that permeates much of the work undertaken by the Upper Saco Valley Land Trust. If a property has exemplary wetlands, or overlays one of the region's aquifers, it emerges as a priority for protection.

And yet, water as a “target” for conservation is tricky, since it doesn't stay in one place. Because surface- and ground-water can both flow from a protected property into an area that is not, and back again, we have been spearheading a more inclusive strategy for water resource protection. As detailed in last year's annual report, we have been working with the NH Department of Environmental Services (DES) on identifying potential contamination sources within our New Hampshire towns, and we shared this information with them in 2018. Several expressed interest in doing more and are now working with USVLT and DES to protect their water resources by adopting aquifer-protection ordinances. Each ordinance will be based on DES's template and modified to fit the needs of individual towns. Still in its initial stages, this critical work has far-reaching implications. Once such ordinances are adopted, we can rest a little easier knowing that our water resources – whether on conservation properties or not – are safeguarded.

Great Brook Easement

The late '60s and early '70s bore witness to a shift in perspective and the birth of a new environmental awareness, thanks to offshore oil spills, Earthrise on Apollo 8, and the publication of *Silent Spring*. In response, America created the Environmental Protection Agency and a host of environmental laws, among them the 1968 Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

It only seems fitting, then, that USVLT protected an additional half-mile of river frontage along Mount Washington Valley's own designated Wild and Scenic River, 50 years after the act's passage. The Wildcat River system in Jackson (including portions of tributaries such as Bog Brook and Great Brook, where this easement is located), is one of only two Wild and Scenic rivers in New Hampshire. For centuries, residents and visitors have celebrated the river as Jackson's agricultural, scenic, and recreational central artery.

A group of passionate residents fought to defeat a proposed hydroelectric dam in the mid-1980s, in part through designating the Wildcat River system as Wild and Scenic (accomplished in 1988). The original designation spurred the protection of over 800 acres within the watershed (mostly through donations of conservation easements to the Town of Jackson). Many of those same advocates helped found USVLT 12 years later as the area's local land trust. The addition of the Great Brook easement to USVLT's conservation lands follows in this proud tradition, and is a testament to the power of water, our communities, and shared history.



Dundee Birches with Swallow House/Ellen Snyder

SUMMER

EXPLORING NEW PROPERTIES

The snowshoes, skis and micro-spikes have been put away, and the muddy country roads are finally dry. Summer in the mountains has arrived, along with two new Land Trust assets to add to your summertime explorations. Grab your gear and come explore two of USVLT's latest conservation successes, Pine Hill Community Forest and the Ansara parcel.

One of USVLT's largest and most complex land-conservation projects to date, the 436-acre Pine Hill Community Forest almost completely surrounds Kennett High School in Conway. Its acquisition depended on a dynamic fundraising partnership with Tin Mountain Conservation Center (TMCC), as well as grants from the Open Space Institute's Community Forest Fund, NH's Land and Community Heritage Investment Program, the Fields Pond Foundation, the William P. Wharton Fund, the Davis Conservation Foundation, the Town of Conway, and the Marshall Family Fund of the NH Charitable Foundation. Formerly owned by the Kennett Company, this unique mixed-use parcel provides important environmental benefits, including wildlife habitat and surface- and ground-water protection. Equally significant, the forest offers a range of recreational assets, from Saco River access to the Conway Rec Path, as well as an extensive network of other multi-use trails.

The parcel's proximity to Kennett High School affords rich opportunities to widen and deepen the educational and extra-curricular experiences of students. The school's mountain-biking team already accesses trails for training rides, and USVLT and TMCC hope to partner with educators to further develop hands-on outdoor environmental programs out in the forest.

An advisory committee representing a diverse constituency is already guiding the stewardship of Pine Hill, utilizing the skills of its members from the

Conway Select Board, the Conway Conservation Commission, SAU 9, local trail organizations, and TMCC and USVLT. As such, the committee presents a mutually beneficial avenue to strengthen key relationships.

Partnership and collaboration are also at the heart of the "Secure the Ledges Initiative" – an effort to permanently protect land and safeguard public access at the bases of White Horse and Cathedral Ledges near North Conway. A collaborative effort between Friends of the Ledges, the Access Fund and USVLT, the Initiative got a boost with the donation of a key parcel of land in 2018. Thanks to the generosity of the land's previous owner, Jim Ansara of Essex, Massachusetts, the property had remained open to public use and retained its natural character since he purchased it in 1997.

While USVLT now owns the parcel, the Access Fund is the holder of its permanent conservation and recreation easement. Conserving this key tract secures public access along the Bryce Path and Bryce Link, and protects the forested foreground seen from both ledges. This initiative is ongoing and we hope to secure access across two additional parcels in the near future. Stay tuned!

Wondering how to access these parcels?

Our gorgeous new website can help! The redesign was accomplished by our Outreach and Office Manager, Trisha Beringer, and made possible by a grant from the Pequawket Foundation and a significant in-kind contribution from the talented team at Drive Brand Studio. Lands with public access are highlighted on the new website so you know exactly where to go. Just click "Map" at the top right of the home page, and then scroll down to see the links under "Trail Maps for our Conserved Land with Public Access." www.usvlt.org



Cathedral Ledge/Mike Morin



USVLT Local Food System Advocate Jesse Wright at the Jackson Farmers' Market at the Thompson House Eatery/Cait Bourgault

AUTUMN

ADVANCING LOCAL AGRICULTURE

Fall is the “gathering in” season, a time to stack firewood, establish back-to-school routines, and haul in and put up the harvest. The Upper Saco Valley Land Trust service area boasts superlative agricultural soils which rival the best in the Northeast. While farming in New England once meant dairy, there has been a sea change shift toward diversification. Today, the range of available products reflects the energy and ingenuity of farmers, offering everything from mushrooms, meats, and cheeses to staples like maple syrup, honey, and a stunning array of produce and value-added items.

Yet here, as across the country, diversified family-scale farms face huge challenges. USVLT is committed to the regional food system as a whole, acknowledging that conservation of farmland is only one component of a healthy system. Analysts assert that New England has the potential to produce more than 50% of its food by 2060, with associated economic, health, and environmental benefits. With that in mind, USVLT is working to increase the size and resiliency of local markets, to support farmers, and to increase collaboration within our food system.

As USVLT’s Local Food Systems Advocate, Jesse Wright is focused on assuring that farmers have the technical tools and available support to operate at a profit, and that more consumers and regional businesses are seeking out local products. The scope of her position was amplified in 2018 by the receipt of a \$30,000 USDA Rural Business Development grant, which funds a three-prong initiative including Scaling Up Workshops launching in January of 2019. These workshops offer a window into efficiency and record keeping, marketing, and the

financial implications of growing a business. Participants also receive 15 hours of assistance from a consultant, and \$500 seed money to implement lessons learned.

The grant’s second component involves strengthening or helping start Farm-to-School programs that share the importance of our local food system with our youngest generations. The third prong is a strategic and collaborative marketing effort highlighting our area’s family-scale farms.

Eating local and supporting our region’s farms begin with awareness of who and where they are, of course. To that end, Wright, along with UNH Cooperative Extension’s Olivia Saunders, publish several farm guides. These guides (digital versions available under “Publications” on the usvlt.org website) are organized by farm or by product, as well as listing which farms run a CSA program. There’s even a version specific for chefs telling what’s available for wholesale orders when, and from whom, and a calendar of local farmers’ markets. Together, by conscientiously investing our food dollars with our neighboring farms, we can help make our local food system more resilient.

Local Farms Fêted at Fields on the Saco

Despite the crisp weather outside, our donors and volunteers came out in force to celebrate local conservation efforts at the 2018 Fields on the Saco dinner. Held at the Hardy Farm, overlooking the fertile fields along the Old Course of the Saco in West Fryeburg, the venue and food were stunning and perfectly paired. Featuring chefs from the Oxford House Inn, Thompson House Eatery, Libby’s Bistro & SAaLT Pub, White Mountain Cider Company, Wildcat Inn & Tavern, Vintage Baking Company, Tavern at Sunset Hill, and food from many of the member farms of the Mount Washington Valley Eaters & Growers, the evening was a culinary and agricultural celebration. It was a huge financial success, too, thanks to the generosity of the supporters gathered. Cheers to the 2019 celebration, October 20th!



Fields on the Saco/ Mike Daubenspek

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USDA - Rural Business
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Local Source Water Protection
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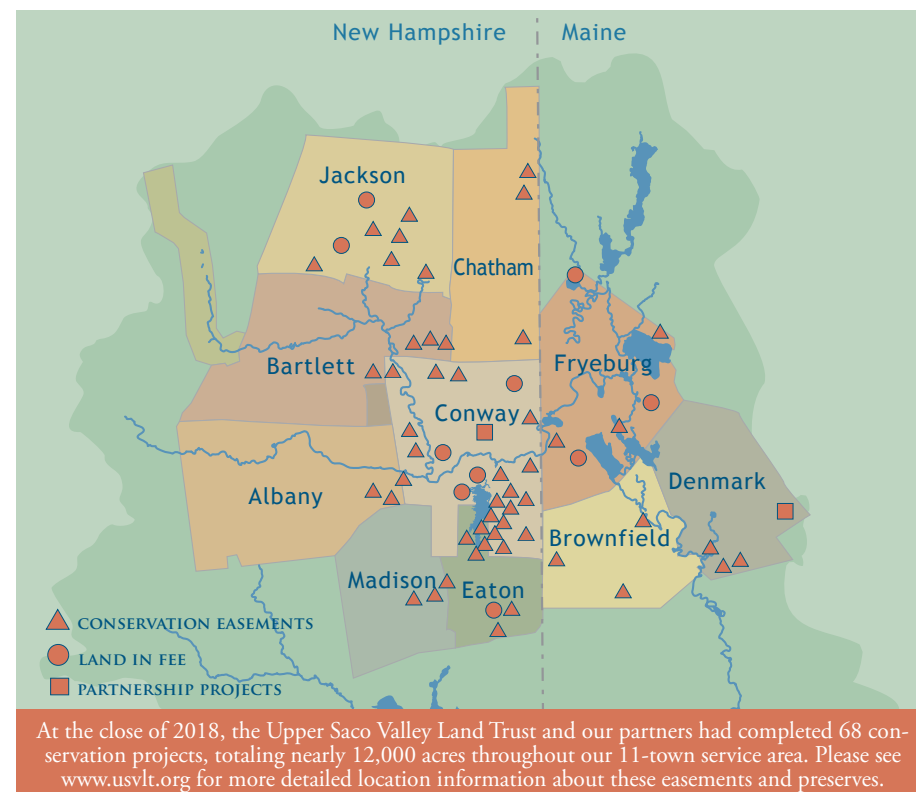
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 White Mountain Puzzles



FINANCIAL REPORT

(Year Ended December 31, 2018 — Unaudited)

COMBINED STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES

	Unrestricted	Temporarily Restricted	Total
REVENUE:			
Membership Contributions	\$ 84,436	\$ -	\$ 84,436
Grants and Donations	94,403	399,974	494,377
Other	38,946	-	38,946
Net Assets Released from Restrictions	130,217	(130,217)	-
Total Operating Revenue	\$348,002	\$ 269,757	\$ 617,759
EXPENSES:			
Program Services:			
Land Protection & Easement Acquisition	\$ 128,604	\$ -	\$ 128,604
Land Stewardship	80,206	-	80,206
Total Program Services	208,810	-	208,810
Management and General	82,515	-	82,515
Fundraising	14,053	-	14,053
Total Operating Expenses	305,378	-	305,378
Change in Net Assets	\$ 42,624	\$ 269,757	\$312,381

COMBINED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

	Unrestricted	Temporarily Restricted	Permanently Restricted	Total
ASSETS:				
Cash, Unrestricted	\$111,116	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 111,116
Cash, Restricted	-	535,739	-	535,739
Pledges Receivable	-	-	-	-
Prepaid Expenses	1,739	-	-	1,739
Beneficial Interest Held by Others	-	-	189,165	189,165
Property & Equipment, net	5,478	-	-	5,478
Land & Conservation Easements	-	-	1,684,338	1,684,338
Total Assets	\$118,333	\$ 535,739	\$1,873,503	\$2,527,575
LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS:				
Accrued Expenses	\$17,336	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 17,336
Net Assets	100,997	535,739	1,873,503	2,510,239
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$118,333	\$ 535,739	\$1,873,503	\$2,527,575

Unrestricted funds may be used for day to day operations. Temporarily restricted funds are grants and donations for a specific project or purpose to be used in the future. Permanently restricted assets include land, easements and stewardship endowment.

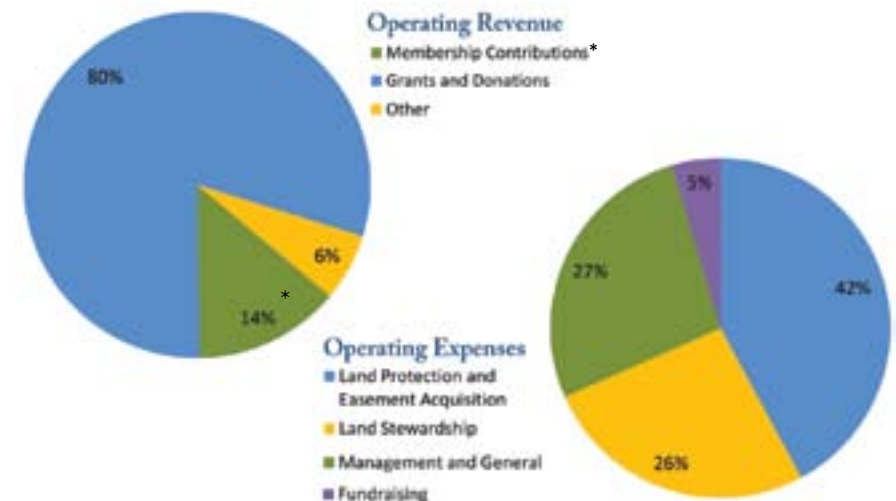


The year ending December 31, 2018, was very successful. Although USVLT projected that tax-law changes might result in reduced membership support, the opposite was true. Members were extremely generous, underwriting our continued growth. Those donations allowed for increases in our financial reserves, which will support the organization in the event of an economic downturn, help insure easement terms are met, and attract and retain qualified staff.

Highlights included:

- Celebrating the highest membership support in the organization's history, thanks to new members joining and existing members increasing their donation level,
- Successfully completing significant land-protection projects and securing long-term stewardship funding for these acquisitions,
- Acquiring the Pine Hill Community Forest, the organization's most ambitious land project to date,
- Attaining financial strength sufficient to support more than three full-time equivalent staff, which will foster long-term viability through increased focus on development and diversification of skillsets, and
- Significantly increasing cash reserves to allow the Land Trust to continue its mission even in the event of a down turn in the economy.

For the Land Trust to carry out its mission, the support of members and the local community is essential. Membership donations underwrite operating costs, and the organization's continuing ability to preserve land for community benefit is only made possible with your support. Thank you.



*The financials reported here include income and expenses relating both to our operating budget, as well as campaigns run for special projects or specific land projects. While membership support accounts for 14% of total income in 2018, it accounts for an impressive 42% of "operating income" that is not tied to a specific project. Thank you.