

The Restorative Power of Natural Places

By Peter Benson

2019 is the two hundredth anniversary of the birth of Walt Whitman, who along with other nineteenth century authors Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller and Louisa May Alcott, pioneered the transcendental movement in the United States. Some of the core tenets of transcendental philosophy are the inherent goodness of humans and nature and how they intersect. There is a deep gratitude and appreciation of nature, not only for aesthetic reasons, but as an essential restorative “tonic” for the body and soul.

I have spent part of this summer re-reading Whitman’s seminal work of narrative poetry, *Leaves of Grass*, which Whitman self-published in 1855 at the age of 36. Whitman continually emphasizes self-reliance, personal freedom, the power of the individual and their deep relationship to the

natural world. The constant themes of the restorative power of nature and self-empowerment brought me back to a time when nature saved me both physically and mentally.

In 2009, after an over-aggressive game of middle school parent-student soccer, I found myself with the perfect storm of a blown out knee: ACL, MCL and LCL all torn in an instant. Facing surgery and an intensive rehabilitation, I contemplated the unthinkable: a winter without skiing. After successful surgery, I began physical therapy with the goal of getting back into the woods by the spring. It was a meager snow year, with lots of icy conditions, less than ideal for outdoor pursuits, let alone getting around on crutches.

Two months of near insanity and some pleading and negotiation with my physician resulted in a very tentative OK to classic ski on flat

terrain. But the challenge of nearby flat terrain with good access left me with limited options. Fortunately, I live just up the road from USVLT’s very first land protection project, the Harding Easement. This became my lifeline to rehabilitation. Day after day, I would lightly ski lap after lap, kilometer after kilometer until my strength returned. Just as important as my physical rehabilitation, I realized that this small protected easement had saved me mentally and emotionally, and had rescued my spirit during that long recovery.

How this would have happened without the foresight of this protection and its restorative powers I do not know. I am only glad that I was a part of it and it a part of me. I still regard this meadow fondly as I walk or ski on it, and revel and give thanks in how important it was to my body and spirit.



Photo: Lucy Catchell

“Now I see the secret of making the best person—it is to grow in the open air, and to eat and sleep with the earth.” —WALT WHITMAN



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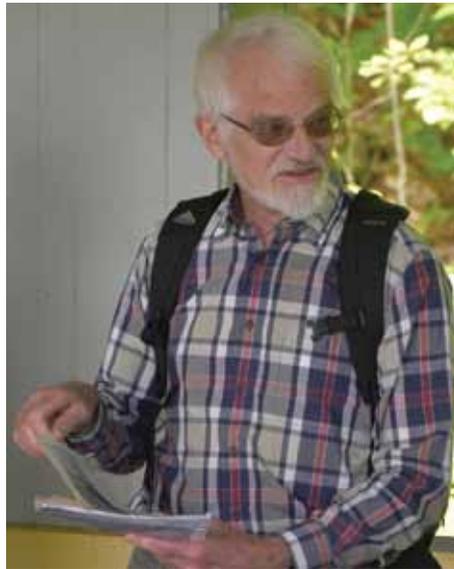
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USVLT President's Message



Doug Burnell

As newly re-elected Board member Peter Benson points out in his introductory article, nature has the power to heal, both physically and mentally, allowing us to transcend the fray of the day-to-day. But therein lies the rub for some: how to get out into nature in the first place? Increasing and enhancing public access on conservation land, where appropriate, remains one of the central goals of USVLT's strategic organizational plan. To that end, in recent years we have supported the design of appropriate multi-use

trails, partnered with other nonprofit organizations aimed at getting folks outdoors, and hired contractors to construct parking areas. Two such preserves with ample public access opportunities are highlighted in this publication with a new tear-out section: Leita Monroe Lucas Preserve in East Conway and the Albany Town Forest. Please use the maps and explore these backyard gems if you haven't already happened across them. Other efforts include the backcountry ski access afforded through the 2018 acquisition of the Ware Preserve (Bartlett), and collaboration with Recon Trail Design (Matt Coughlin) in planning multi-use trails at the Pine Hill Community Forest (Conway). Accessibility is key, and preliminary designs will highlight potential ADA-accessible trails, in addition to all the other public access opportunities. The new Redstone Preserve donation from John Schiavi (see the Project Updates), with existing biking, hiking and snowmobile trails, also adds to the neighborhood mix. While wild, untrammled areas will always remain a critical part of our landholdings, we aspire to create the "best person" (in Walt Whitman's words) by making it easy for everyone to "grow in the open air." Please join us.

What's Going on along Dundee Road in Bartlett & Jackson?

There is an incredible conservation opportunity at the northern end of our 11-town service area. The Beal family lands, more than 1,200 acres across 17 different parcels in both Bartlett and Jackson, offer the potential to become our newest Community Forest. Another partnership project, USVLT is working with the Trust for Public Land on this initiative, which will come to fruition only if our fundraising and grant-writing efforts are successful. To start the ball rolling, a Forest Legacy Grant, which could underwrite more than 60% of the project costs, has been applied for. In the interim, we will be hosting listening sessions in both Jackson and Bartlett to help answer people's questions and hear concerns. Stay tuned!

News Flash: This October, we will be moving into office space recently vacated by Mountain Top Music on Main Street in Conway Village. Come visit us!

The Albany Town Forest provides many recreational opportunities from biking to hiking, as well as income to the Town of Albany in the form of valuable forest products. The protection of this land also safeguards the spectacular views to Mount Washington from NH Route 16 and along the Kancamagus Highway, a National Scenic Byway. USVLT completed this partnership project with the Trust for Public Land and the Town of Albany in 2012, permanently protecting 302 acres across several parcels.

“As a Kennett High School student in the 1960s, I ran and skied on the trails along the Swift River assuming that this beautiful forest would always be here. With 40 years hindsight, it is particularly rewarding to see this assumption realized. This property is not only a town forest benefiting the citizens of Albany, it’s also a place of recreation, and a gateway to our much loved Kancamagus Highway.”

—Tom Earle, Former Board President

Grants from the Open Space Institute, NH’s Land & Community Heritage Investment Program, NH Moose Plate Program, NH Fish & Game, NH Department of Transportation, and many others made this project possible.



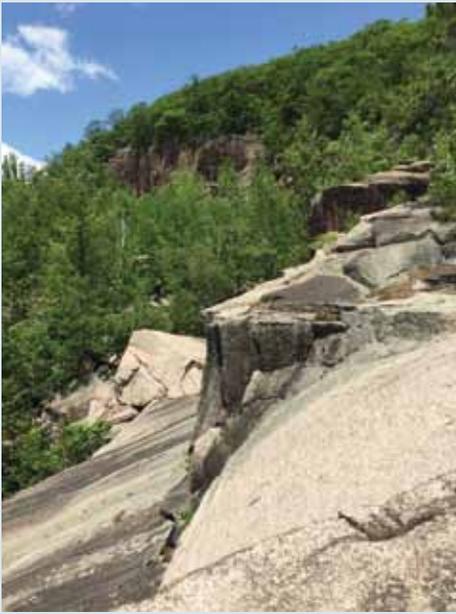
Tucked away in the northeast corner of Conway, this 62-acre piece of land was given to USVLT by Barrett Lucas in honor of his wife, the late Leita Monroe Lucas. Leita's family has deep roots in East Conway and Redstone, and her father, Ernest "Red" Monroe, also wanted to see the land preserved. Adjacent to the Conway Common Lands State Forest, the Green Hills Preserve, and the White Mountain National Forest, this parcel builds on an existing network of preserved land, and has wonderful opportunities for public access. The site is also remarkable as the one-time summer residence of the American Impressionist painter Thomas Wilmer Dewing, and his fellow painter and wife, Maria Oakey Dewing. Their cottages, built at the turn of the last century, fell into disrepair in the mid-1900s. Now only the chimney remains onsite.

Thanks to support from our conservation partners (Natural Resources Conservation Service, Appalachian Mountain Club, and a host of other volunteers), we've installed a loop trail and parking area onsite. Along the trails you will find interpretive signage explaining the fascinating history behind the property and memories of what once was. Visitors with two legs and four legs are both welcome to view the picturesque cascades, stunning views from the height of land, and the remains of the area's earliest settlements.



Conservation Project Updates

Announcing Two New Land Donations



Redstone Properties— Conway, NH

In August of 2019, USVLT received a donation of 95 acres near the historic Redstone Village from John Schiavi (Redstone Properties). For decades, the property has been used by bikers, hikers, neighborhood dog-walkers and snowmobilers (Corridor 19 crosses it). The land also abuts The Nature Conservancy's Green Hills Preserve, so permanent ownership by USVLT only made sense. The property is considered "Supporting Landscape" for the rare natural communities just upslope, and it includes portions of the historic Redstone Quarry. Public access, historic assets, and natural resources make this property a true conservation gem, checking all the proverbial boxes. USVLT will partner with other area nonprofit groups for the ongoing management of this parcel, to continue responsible public access onsite and shine a light on Redstone's fascinating history.



Hill Family Lands— Eaton, NH

In November, USVLT expects to become the owner of 221 acres of pristine forest land along Paul Hill Road in Eaton. Purchased in stages by George and Helene Hill starting in 1966, and stewarded as a registered Tree Farm, the property is now owned by the extended Hill Family. They will be gifting the land to USVLT while retaining lifetime use rights for the small house onsite. Abutting other conservation properties, including a parcel already owned by USVLT as well as land owned by the Town of Eaton, and proximate to Foss Mountain, this forestland adds to an impressive "habitat block" and protects existing wildlife corridors. We thank the Hill Family for their generosity and vision.



Lucy Brook Farm— Conway, NH

Just down the road from the 2016 Lucy Family Farm project, this historic farm is owned by a different branch of the same family. In addition to rich soils, this iconic farm sits near the base of Cathedral Ledge, and also has extensive river frontage along the Saco River. The "grant review" period for this project is underway, and in early 2020, another 45 acres of precious West Side Road farmland will be protected forever. Stay tuned!

—Project Updates continued on page 7



The Land Trust welcomed three board members in May 2019 who bring a diversity of expertise and experience. **Peter Benson** (right), who served on USVLT's steering committee and was on the original board until 2006, returns for another stint. Peter moved to the region in 1986, initially working for the Appalachian Mountain Club. After leaving AMC, he worked for The Nature Conservancy, the Governor of NH as the Special Assistant/North Country Liaison, and for the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation (Senior Program Officer). Some of Peter's other affiliations include the Jackson School Board, Tin Mountain Conservation Center, Jackson Historical Society, Jackson Volunteer Fire Department (where he has been Forest Fire Warden for 26 years).

A Mount Washington Valley native, **Alex Drummond** (center) is an avid outdoorsman and a self-proclaimed plant lover. He has been a climbing guide for the International Mountain Climbing School, a youth ski coach for the Wildcat Mountain Alpine Education Foundation, a landscape gardener with Alpine Gardening, and owner and operator of Mountain Sun Yoga Studio. For the past 14 years, he has worked for RE/MAX Presidential in North Conway as a licensed real estate agent (in both ME and NH). Alex lives in East Conway with his wife, Terry Young, and family.

Greg Cooper (left) holds a Master's Degrees in Environmental Management and Forestry from the Nicholas School of the Environment at Duke University, and a BS in Biology (Drew University). He also served in the US Peace Corps in Paraguay from 2010 to 2012. His work experience includes analyzing and advocating for urban forests, as well as positions with The Nature Conservancy, the Three Rivers Land Trust, and The Land Conservancy of New Jersey. Currently a forester with the US Forest Service, Greg has been on the USVLT Land Committee since 2016. A Madison resident, Greg also serves as Treasurer for the Pine Hill Community Forest Advisory Committee.

Land projects are USVLT's core mission, and as the organization approaches its 20th anniversary, 70 have been completed conserving more than 12,000 acres. The associated stewardship issues are complex, and in 2019 **Peter Howe** joined USVLT to focus on them.

Peter first worked for the Land Trust in 2018 as a Stewardship Intern, and subsequently earned his BA degree in Geography and Environmental Studies from Middlebury College. Since Peter is a native of NH's Lakes Region with the White Mountains for a backyard, his move to the Mount Washington Valley was a natural one. Peter brings map-making and GIS expertise to the Land Trust, where his other responsibilities include easement monitoring and third-party reporting, preserve maintenance, trail development, and signage design and installation. Implementing management plans for USVLT's preserves is another priority. When not out on our easements and preserves, Peter is likely off running ridges across the Whites, or tending to his apple trees in Holderness.

This summer, Erika Rowland left USVLT to become the new Executive Director of the Greater Lovell Land Trust (GLLT). Erika's new position solidifies a long-standing partnership between the two neighboring organizations. Over the years, GLLT and USVLT have shared Board and committee members, and USVLT's one-time Board President, Tom Henderson, was GLLT's Executive Director for nearly a decade. Congratulations to Erika!

Abby King is on board as USVLT's new Conservation Lands Manager, leading stewardship programs and assisting our Executive Director and Land Committee on selecting and vetting new land projects. Another of her priorities is to ensure that all protocols for both stewardship and new

—*New Staff continued on page 7*



acquisition work meet the high bar required of accredited land trusts. A resident of Fryeburg (and Vice-Chair of Fryeburg’s Conservation Committee), Abby previously worked for the Natural Resources Council of Maine, the Bicycle Coalition of Maine, the Royal River Conservation Trust in Yarmouth, and Mahoosuc Pathways in Bethel. Abby is a Registered Maine Guide, and has many years of experience in guiding backcountry trips in all seasons. A graduate of Colgate University (Bachelor of Arts in Environmental Geography) and the Harris School for Public Policy at the University of Chicago (Master of Public Policy), Abby also brings a passion for community planning and advocacy to her new position. Welcome, Abby!



World Fellowship Center on Whitton Pond—Albany

Publicly announced a year ago, the World Fellowship Center project will protect over 400 acres of land brimming with abundant natural resource attributes in the Whitton Pond and Chocorua River watersheds in Albany. Thanks to several government grants and our members’ generosity, we completed the fundraising for this project in early 2019. A property survey and due-diligence items are being finalized, and this project is on track to close this winter.

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Hardy Farm ~ Fryeburg, ME

Highlighting community agriculture and talented chefs from these MWV restaurants, USVLT brings the two together for a night in celebration of land



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For more info & to purchase tickets visit: https://www.usvlt.org/fields_on_the_saco Photo courtesy of Weston's Farm

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