

UPPER SACO VALLEY LAND TRUST

Preserving Land for Community Benefit

Autumn 2024

Portal to Another World Chain of Ponds Community Forest

By Lindsay Kafka

Photo: Joe Klementovch

This excerpt is taken from an article published in the Fall 2024 issue of Vibe magazine muvvibe.com/ available at newsstands around the Mount Washington Valley.

Not far from the local elementary school and just beyond the small public library, Forest Pines Road in Madison, New Hampshire, winds through a compact residential neighborhood and past a dirt road intersected by the rectilinear scars of a transmission line and a railroad corridor. This unremarkable dirt road is much more than it seems, however. More than a logging road, it is a portal to a magical glacial landscape that was formed during the Pleistocene epoch and its repeated cycles of ice ages. That geological history shaped the land in distinctive ways that are both fun to explore and deserving of protection. Now, because of a decades-

long effort by committed individuals and sister conservation organizations, the Upper Saco Valley Land Trust (USVLT) is on the cusp of conserving 625 acres of this landscape forever, for the benefit of current residents of and visitors to the Mt. Washington Valley, not to mention future generations.

Dubbed “Chain of Ponds” for its distinct north-south necklace of ponds and bogs, the property to be conserved consists of seven contiguous tracts that feature unique glacial landforms such as kettle hole bogs and ponds interwoven with eskers. Conservation of this critical landscape will connect it to existing conserved lands to create a 1700-acre uninterrupted block in the southern foothills of the Mt. Washington Valley.

Stretching almost imperceptibly across two watersheds in a backwater valley, the property fronts on Davis

Pond on its north end, protecting the headwaters of Pequawket Brook, which flows through Conway Village into the Swift River. Also on the north, the property abuts the Madison Boulder Natural Area, home to North America’s largest “glacial erratic” (i.e., a rock from elsewhere dislodged by a glacier), which has been designated a National Natural Landmark by the U.S. Department of the Interior. The Chain of Ponds’ southern water bodies flow into Forest Brook, the north Inlet of Silver Lake.

Community

Ultimately, Chain of Ponds will be managed as a community forest. Community forests are protected forest lands funded in part by a national US Forest Service grant program. USVLT applied for and was awarded \$400,000 in grant funding through the highly

—continued on page 7

“The Earth is what we all have in common.”

WENDELL BERRY

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President's Message



Stating it directly, USVLT has been experiencing too many staff transitions during the last two and a half years. This statement is news to some of you and a known concern to others, but I believe it is important to share and reemphasize with all of you one of our most significant challenges. We aren't alone, as many other organizations, including neighboring land trusts, are struggling with staffing as well, some to the point of negotiating mergers. The causes of our staffing instability are many and varied, with both organizational and personal factors involved.

During this unstable period, we have been facing a steadily growing flow of great conservation projects, expanding stewardship responsibilities, and increasing funding needs. To keep up, we have been filling our staffing gaps with extraordinary help from veteran employees, experienced board and committee members, and technical-services contractors. Our deep appreciation goes

out to all who have worked so hard to keep USVLT thriving. But beyond these noble stopgap measures, USVLT needs to grow our capacity to do good work.

As of this printing, Eric White has passed his first third of a year as USVLT's new Executive Director, learning and leading in an affable and effective way. The board and staff are committed to working with Eric to build our team by prioritizing employee and volunteer engagement, providing growth and development opportunities, fostering a positive work culture, recognizing our peoples' achievements, and offering competitive compensation and benefits.

With our solid foundation as an accredited land trust, our established presence as a community resource, and remarkable support from our donors, funders and volunteers, we are looking forward to continuing conservation successes in the upper Saco valley! And to becoming fully staffed...

Meet USVLT's New Executive Director



By Eric White

I'm new to the Upper Saco Valley Land Trust. Actually, I'm new to land trusts, so I have a lot to learn. Yet, you could also say that this work is a part of me. My father's family worked a farm in East Peacham, Vermont. As a kid, I would visit my grandfather and uncle, helping to care for the farm and surrounding forests. My grandmother, an avid naturalist and respected ornithologist, led nature and birding walks from the farm, and would write a monthly column, "Musings of an Old Country Woman," for the North Star paper about the relationship between the woods, the farm, and the people. She would perch herself on a small, self-built viewing stand across the road to record the annual Audubon bird count, or to watch her avian friends visit the meadow, marsh, and river. Later, she donated this land where the perch still stands to this day.

My grandparents' blood runs in my veins. My first job started in 4th grade working on a farm, where I would care for horses, cattle, and small fields. In college, I traded modern farming to work summers in 19th century clothes at Old Sturbridge Village (OSV), where one of my primary responsibilities was portraying a farmer working on the

historic farm. It was a major transition mowing hay with a scythe, plowing fields with oxen, shearing sheep with hand-shears, and tapping maple trees with sumac spiles. I fortunately had a lot of great teachers, including Bob Craig and Ray Small, who had worked farms since they were boys in the 1920s. Even more special was my relationship with Bob, who was born, raised, and went to a one-room schoolhouse with my grandmother in Peacham.

During one of my first seasons working at OSV, one of the cows was due and laid in the yard bellowing, her eyes wet, and was breathing heavily. I panicked, thinking she's going to calve, and in all my time around farm animals I never had to deal with that alone. I raced off to find Bob and Ray in one of the fields and excitedly told them the situation. They looked at me, and in

their quiet manner said, "so she's layin' on the ground, pantin', eyes wet, and bellowin'?"

"Yes," I said anxiously, "what should I do?"

Bob put his arm around my shoulder and said, "Son, you're lookin' at the wrong end of the cow. She's just hot." He was right, of course, as she calved about a week later.

I spent 25 years working at OSV, before going to work at the Boston Society of Architects for 17 years. Those were both great experiences. I'm so excited to be a part of the USVLT team, and you can bet there will be times that I'll be looking at a situation from the wrong end. If you see that happen, just put your hand on my shoulder and say, "Son, let's try looking at this from a different end."



Eric at OSV plowing with ox team Tad & Tim

USVLT Honors Valley Conservationists

By Ken Olson

At its 24th annual gathering held May 4 at Tin Mountain Conservation Center, in Albany, Upper Saco Valley Land Trust conferred three first-ever recognitions: the Award for Excellence in Volunteerism; the Conservation Colleague Award; and the President's Award for Damn Good Work.

The meeting featured keynote speaker Rick Van de Poll, Ph.D., educator-naturalist, who later guided attendees on a walk at Chain of Ponds in Madison (see page one).

At the presentation, Ann Bennett, of Jackson, was given USVLT's highest volunteer award, for consensus-building and "her patent humility as a fundraiser, coalescing the altruism of others like her" to drive the organization's 1,250-acre Dundee Community Forest acquisition to completion last year.

The organization named Bennett "Her Honor, Madam Mayor of Dundee."

Saco River Brewing was cited for its vigorous support of efforts by USVLT and the town of Fryeburg, Maine, to protect Jockey Cap, an area landmark and rock-climbing venue.

The trust thanked Saco River Brewing's staff – the "whole heady, foamy bunch of you" – for the company's "loving craft [that] helps protect your namesake aquifer, from which you draw your sweet, happy, hoppy, tangy, quenching waters, and which we quaff with joy."

Jenna Irish of SRB accepted for the family-owned brewery.

USVLT's President's Award for Damn Good Work went to Linda Comeau, a principal founder of the trust, who has served as a board member, contractor, employee, land negotiator, property steward and fundraiser, and has "long and lovingly taken care of our sweet valley-and-mountain-and-bog-and-



Ann Bennett, "Madam Mayor of Dundee," awarded for volunteer work

stream-and-creaturely home, which life's work entitles you hereinafter to be known as Ms. Land Lady of the Valley." Linda continues to do her "damn good work" as the USVLT Easement Steward.

We look forward to next year's annual meeting, when we will celebrate excellence by recognizing people and organizations whose dedication to land conservation sets the standard for us all.



Linda Comeau, "Land Lady of the Valley," presented the President's Award

Wonders of Jockey Cap

By Doug Burnell

Jockey Cap was one of those outsized wonders of my childhood summer days spent in Fryeburg at our nearby camp on Lovewell's Pond. Wonderful enough was the profile of this giant bare ledge protruding out from the surrounding pitch pine/scrub oak plains. Add in the dark mysteriousness of Molly Ockett's Cave at the base, the delightful airiness of the scramble up sparkling garnet and mica-infused slab, and the solid presence of the Admiral Peary rangefinder naming countless peaks in a 360° sweep from the top, and sheer magic was achieved!

For centuries the Pequawket tribe of the western Abenaki confederacy lived in a sizable village on the flank of Pine Hill, overlooking their cultivated floodplain fields along the Saco River. The river served as their main highway to the coast, and Jockey Cap marked the route of a flat two-mile portage from the village through Lovewell's Pond, which saved 30 miles of river travel around the Great Bend of the Saco. Spurning the planned town center where founder Joseph Frye built his house three miles to the north, the early Fryeburgers of European descent instead settled around the Pequawket's old well-situated village, leaving Jockey Cap just on the edge of town. Meanwhile, Molly Ockett, the remarkable wife of Chief Paugus, and likely the last member of the Pequawket Tribe to live locally, resided in the boulder cave at the foot of Jockey Cap when she lived in the area.

Over the two winters of 1936 to 1938, a ski slope and automobile-engine-powered rope tow – purportedly the first in Maine – operated on the east flank of Jockey Cap, uphill from today's new trailhead parking lot. Many snow train arrivals and locals came out for coaching and for ski 'coasting' and 'sliding' on runs here and onto Weston's Farm land off the backside of Pine Hill and at Stark's Hill.



Photo: B. Anthony Stewart for National Geographic Society, 1936

The summer of 1938, all the Jockey Cap lot east of Route 302 was sold off, and a wayside store/filling station was built just west of the shortest route up to Molly Ockett's Cave. A white wooden archway marked the entrance to the trail out of the store parking lot. Today, the latest version of the arch has been moved to the new 2024 trailhead.

In 1995, one of the Pike heirs conveyed his acquired half-interest in the Jockey Cap property to the Town of Fryeburg, while the other half remained under the ownership of Helen Pike Leadbeater. Helen was a renowned amateur archeologist whom I spent some of my idle boyhood summer time observing and 'helping' uncover fire rings, pottery shards, and flint scrapers and arrow-

heads from the long, vacant stretch of sandy beach next to our camp. Helen's son Randy, later known as Arizona Zipper, and a long-time friend of our family, inherited his mother's Jockey Cap half-interest in 1998; kept the property preserved—albeit essentially unmanaged in its split-ownership limbo—and graciously sold it to USVLT for conservation in 2021 as his health was failing. Sadly, Arizona passed in June 2023. Today, USVLT has turned the land over to the Town of Fryeburg and maintains the conservation easement, thus preserving the wonders of Jockey Cap in perpetuity.

To read Doug's full reflection on the Wonders of Jockey Cap, visit our website usvlt.org/jockey-cap-project

Land Project Updates

Conservation projects take time; Some are finalized within a few months, while others take years before concluding, and occasionally a few that never reach their end. Each success is made possible through the generosity of landowners, donors, and volunteers, and through the commitment, expertise, and tenacity of the staff. Over the last year, we have wrapped up several important projects and have more than a dozen more in the works. Currently, there are about 20 projects in the pipeline. The largest preserve project currently in the works is the Madison Chain of Ponds, which is expected to close in the fall of 2025. Below are updates on several recent projects that have closed recently or will be closing soon.



Jockey Cap

Conserved October 1, 2024

Partnering with the Fryeburg Conservation Commission to conserve 15 acres. The land is owned by the Town of Fryeburg, and USVLT holds the conservation easement.



Fryeburg Town Forest Conservation Closing scheduled for October 2024

Partnering with the Fryeburg Conservation Commission to conserve 74 acres of land in Fryeburg, ME.

Town of Fryeburg approved acquisition and USVLT easement in June 2024, and closing is scheduled for October 2024.



Tin Mountain Arboretum Conserved June 28, 2024

Worked with long-term conservation partner Tin Mountain Conservation Center to conserve 68-acre arboretum conservation easement located on Bald Hill Road & Chase Hill Road in Albany, NH.



Bun Lucy Farm Project Conserved May 20, 2024

In their commitment to conserving and protecting land in our valley, long-time supporters Nat & Marianne Lucy generously donated 38.5 acres of land on Upper West Side Road in North Conway, NH.

This project was made possible by the generous funding from the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services' Drinking Water and Groundwater Trust Fund Program.



Community Forests Update

Dundee Community Forest - Conserved July 18th 2023

Partnered with the Trust for Public Land to conserve 1,250 acres in Bartlett and Jackson, NH. This preserve holds diverse habitats including a variety of forest types and ages, vernal pools, ravines, ledges, wetlands, and streams. The Wildcat Brook, a federally designated Wild and Scenic River, starts within this land.

The Dundee Community Forest Advisory Committee has formed with representatives from Jackson, Bartlett, and the USVLT, and has held two meetings. Initial work has included:

- A trout stream restoration project by a team led by the Tin Mountain Conservation Center, adding woody debris to Danny's Brook to form pools
- Significant invasive-plant control measures
- A historic assessment of the 200 year old Ham House by experts from the NH Preservation Alliance.

Pine Hill Community Forest - Conserved January 31, 2022

Partnered with the Town of Conway to conserve 593 acres in the heart of Conway adjacent to the Kennett High School. The preserve hosts over 3 miles of recreation trails.

As mapped out in the Pine Hill Community Forest (PHCF) comprehensive trails plan, we recently added a new section to the loop at the old Saco River Gauging Station road, which ran from Black Bear Village (formerly the Lamplighter Mobile Home Park) to the river, and into the Mineral Spring Trail. This 'lollipop' addition to the multi-use network is the brainchild of Kennett High School cross-country coach Bernie Livingston, with his teams being one of the primary benefactors. Our profound gratitude goes to master trail-builder Rob Adair, who volunteered his expertise and small excavator to construct the 1/3 mile-long connecting link down a gentle ridge.

Chain of Ponds Community Forest Project—continued from page One

Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program, making Chain of Ponds just one of just thirteen projects which were funded nationwide in 2024, in recognition of its extremely high conservation and community value.

A central component of all community forests is that they are stewarded by local groups, giving community stakeholders a direct voice in how these lands are managed over time. In the case of Chain of Ponds, USVLT as property owner, and the Town of Madison as conservation easement holder, will collaborate on management of the property, which will be focused on complying with the requirements of the several grant funders who have invested in the project, and stewarding the property as a community resource that balances responsible conservation with public access.

Project Complexities

Projects such as Chain of Ponds are complex and unfold over years. Even once agreement for the donation or sale of private land to a conservation organization is reached, there are numerous additional steps that must happen before a project is completed, including: detailed and time-consuming survey work; title checks and appraisals; fundraising for the acquisition and project costs, including applying for grants; and much more. The staff and board of USVLT are working hard to consummate this project, and their primary focus this fall is completing the fundraising to make Chain of Ponds Community Forest a reality. To watch a video shot by local photographer Joe Klementovich about the project, please visit YouTube at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lfQ3Pb8Deh4>.

Full article:

<https://mwvibe.com/vibe-online/>

USVLT BY THE NUMBERS

12,000

Conserved Acres

83

Lands Conserved



600+

Active Supporters



40

Miles of Trails



21

Preserves



Forests of New England:

In the early 1800s, about 80% of New England was cleared for farming, meaning less than 20% of the land was forest. Today, about 81% of New England is forest, yet only 3.3% is considered Wildland, i.e. land permanently protected from development.

24

Years of Conserving Land



60+

Volunteer Monitors



15

Farms in Conservation



USVLT couldn't do what we do without the support of this community. Thank you for the countless ways that you support us and in turn, support the conservation of some of the most incredible places in the greater Upper Saco Valley.

Newest Members of the USVLT Community

Staff



Eric White was the long-serving Education Director at Old Sturbridge Village before moving to the Boston Society for Architecture, where he became Executive Director in 2013. White is a history graduate of Denison University. Eric is excited to be joining USVLT and the deeply committed board, staff, members, and volunteers dedicated to conserving the forests, farmlands, and natural beauty of New Hampshire and Maine that help make this a great place to live, work, and play. He and his wife, Melissa, live in Wolfeboro, and he has 3 adult stepchildren and 5 grandchildren. Eric loves kayaking and other outdoor activities and is a wood turner and carver.

Cindy Sellers joins USVLT with a diverse background in surveying and geographic science. At Clark University, she earned a B.S. in Environmental Science and had a unique fellowship studying urban forestry with the HERO program. Cindy's dedication to conservation and sustainability has blossomed into a lifelong mission to understand the ecology of our natural and built environment. She now lives in Tamworth with her family where she enjoys gardening, painting, keeping backyard chickens, and venturing in the woods.

She's devoted to working with the team to preserve and steward the beautiful landscapes of our area.

While being raised in the Mount Washington Valley, **Sam Hanson** developed a deep appreciation for the land and its inhabitants. Almost every weekend, his dad and he would search out new hikes, where he'd always be on the lookout for wildlife. When going to John Fuller Elementary School, he

would walk, bike, and in the wintertime ski there through Whitaker Woods. Since he was ten years old and until he left for college, he volunteered much of his time with the Conway Area Humane Society. He graduated from Kennett High School and went to Southern New Hampshire University, where he received his B.S. in Computer Science. He enjoys hiking, skate-skiing, volleyball, and he tolerates running.

2024 Board Members



Chris Marshall was born and brought up in Conway. He graduated from Kennett in 1965. After college and law school, he settled in Manchester, NH, where he practiced law for over 20 years at the McLane Firm, served for 8 years as a US Trustee in Boston, and spent the last 15 years of his career at the NH Attorney General's Office. Throughout, he maintained close contacts with family,

friends and the mountains in Mount Washington Valley, returning most weekends to ski, hike, bike and socialize. He retired and moved back to Conway in 2022 to be close to the places and people he loves, especially the mountains, rivers, lakes and woodlands that account for so much of the quality of life in the Valley. He believes that anything he can do to help preserve the natural beauty and resources he and his generation have enjoyed is well worth the effort and that USVLT's mission and undertakings are the best way to do so.

Originally from the Pacific Northwest, **Sue Wiley** moved to the Mt. Washington Valley in 2006 after she met her current spouse, Whit Whitman, a longtime resident of the Valley. Sue is mom to Wiley, 23, who lives in Somerville, MA, and she and Whit are parents to two pups, Cookie and Swift, with whom they love to explore the special places in and around the Valley. Sue is a former educator (teacher and principal) who shifted from the classroom to a career as a senior sales and marketing executive in education technology when she moved to NH. Currently, she serves on the Eaton School Board and works as a real estate broker for Senne North Conway. She is licensed in both NH and ME. In addition to her professional pursuits, Sue and Whit have always had a passion for renovating and restoring historical homes in Snowville/Eaton to make them shine again. Sue also loves vintage cars and is co-founder and co-owner of the start-up company, Pacific Rigs, which overhauls and resells vintage Landcruisers.



EXPLORE THESE PUBLIC LANDS



PINE HILL COMMUNITY FOREST

Biking/walking Trails
NEMBA

PEQUAWKET POND

Birds
Seek or INaturalist



WARE PRESERVE

Backcountry SKI Trails
GBA

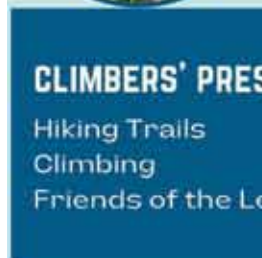
JOCKEY CAP

History
Walking Trails
Climbing



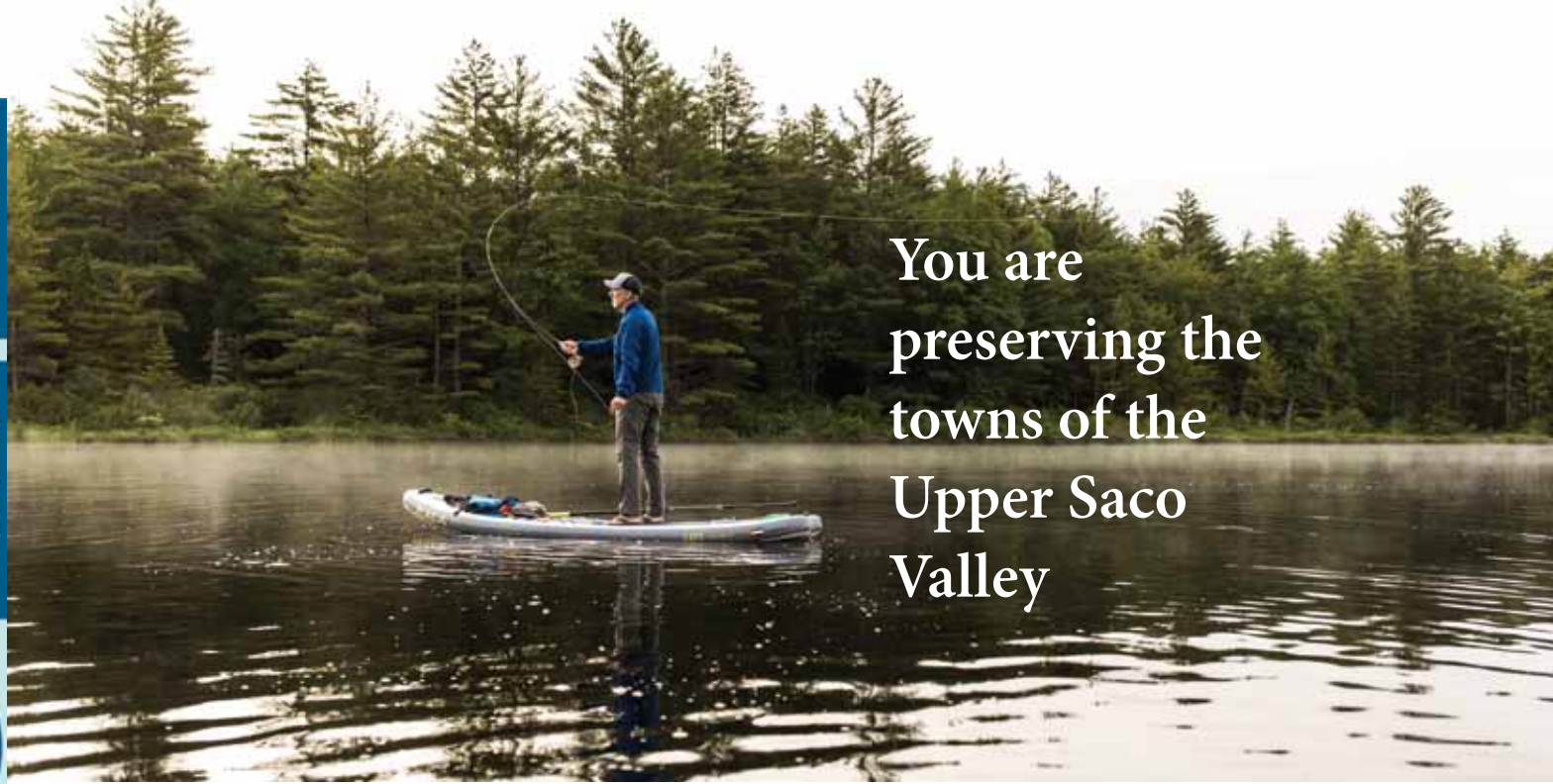
REDSTONE PRESERVE

History
Walking Trails
Mountain Biking Trails



CLIMBERS' PRESERVE

Hiking Trails
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You are preserving the towns of the Upper Saco Valley

EXPLORE THESE PUBLIC LANDS



LEITA MONROE LUCAS

History
Trails



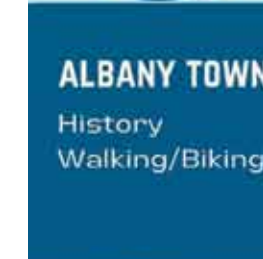
HAYES FARM

Hiking Trails
Iron Mountain



CRANMORE CE

Mountain Biking Trails
Ride NoCo



ALBANY TOWN FOREST

History
Walking/Biking Trails



MT. SURPRISE PRESERVE

History
Walking/Biking Trails



EATON HILLS PRESERVE

Berries
Walking Trails



How you can continue to support USVLT from the Ground Up

For 24 years you have preserved the forests, farms, and wetlands keeping the Valley a beautiful and healthy place to live, work and play. Your generosity provides food for tables, homes for bears, turtles, herons, and other wildlife, and clean water and air for you, your children, and their generations to come. Your support goes directly to:

- Acquiring more wildlife and forest corridors, farmlands, and wetlands in the Valley,
- Caring for the more than 12,000 current acres of preserves and conservation agreements
- Employing the people who are both conserving 80+ current properties and are working to preserve even more.

USVLT Staff



Seven Ways to Support

- **Individual gift.** Your generous gift conserves the places you love in the Valley.
- **Monthly gift.** Increase your annual giving by creating a recurring monthly gift.
- **Donate your vehicle.** Do you want to find a good use for that car, truck, motorcycle, RV, trailer, camper or boat that you no longer need? We can help pick it up and put it to use preserving the Valley.
- **Gift of stocks, or from your IRA.** This is a great way to support conserving the forests and farms while also potentially benefiting from a tax deduction.
- **Gift from your donor advised fund.**
- **Honorarium or Memorial.** Gifts in honor or memorial are great ways to express how you feel about someone important in your life by protecting the land for future generations.
- **Planned gift.** You keep control of your assets during your lifetime, and know that you are remembered for a legacy protecting nature.

To give and keep this work going, visit



usvlt.org/donate or scan the QR code

2024 BUSINESS SUPPORT

BUSINESS PARTNERS

A special THANK YOU to these business partners!

Please support them, because when you do, you're also supporting conservation in the Valley!

CONTRIBUTE TO PLACE AND SACO RIVER LEVEL \$1000+





SWIFT RIVER LEVEL \$500+

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- Flatbread Pizza Company
- Minuteman Press
- Northway Bank
- The Country Consulting Group, Inc.
- White Mountain Oil & Propane
- White Mountain Puzzles

ELLIS RIVER LEVEL \$250+

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- The Local Grocer
- White Birch Books

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 @USVLT

Visit usvt.org to learn more about our work and to find resources about land conservation in the Upper Saco Valley.

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