



SPECIAL EDITION

Fall • Winter 2025

*"Nature is always hinting at us.
It hints over and over again.
And suddenly we take the hint."*

– Robert Frost

"Thar She Blows!"

Is There a Whale in the Valley?

Sometimes the moments that stay with you forever happen when you least expect them.

For me, one came in my mid-20s during a sea kayaking class off the Maine coast with my best friend and my dad.

After a morning learning the basics we paddled to a nearby cove roped off by the New England Aquarium to protect a 4-year-old, 40-foot blue whale that had been feeding there all week.

At the edge of the ropes we floated in silence as it surfaced again and again, diving, lifting its tail, even showing its full body. It seemed curious, watching us as much as we watched it.

I'd never been so awe-struck. Moments like this remind me how deeply connected we can be to nature if we get the chance.

After that day, I bought a sea kayak and have paddled ever since. I've seen many amazing things, but never another whale from my kayak. That moment was rare, humbling, and unforgettable.

You might be wondering: what does a whale have to do with a land trust in the Upper Saco River Valley?

More than you might think. Moments like that don't happen by accident.



Early on, Dad recognized that being in nature with family was a gift I would never forget.

That whale was there because the water was clean enough to support his food. The cove was protected. Someone had drawn a boundary—literal and symbolic—to care for something wild and precious.

That's the work we do here, too.

Whether it's restoring a stream where brook trout thrive, conserving a trail a teenager walks every day, or protecting a family farm that feeds our neighbors, the mission is the same: protecting

places that give us meaning and keep nature thriving—for people and wildlife.

Your favorite moment in nature might not be a whale. Maybe it's skipping stones in the Saco as a kid or hanging out with your family on the river. Perhaps it's meeting a moose on a quiet trail or visiting fields where local food is grown. Some have told me it's the sense of pride when the community comes together to clean up a beloved preserve.

Whatever it is, land conservation makes it possible. And your support makes it happen—now and for generations to come.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Eric".

Eric White
Executive Director

"Moments like this remind me how deeply connected we can be to nature, if we get the chance."



PROJECT UPDATE

Restoring Habitat for Native Brook Trout in Dundee Community Forest

Did you know a native population of brook trout lives in one of the cold, shaded streams within Dundee Community Forest?

These native trout are a sign of exceptional water quality and a healthy watershed, but their habitat faces increasing challenges from erosion, sediment buildup, and rising water temperatures.

To help these fish thrive, we have joined forces with the Tin Mountain Conservation Center in Albany and New Hampshire Fish & Game on a long-term restoration effort to support and expand this rare native population.

The project focuses on restoring natural stream processes by adding pools, “riffles” (shallow areas of the brook), and undercut banks. These features create the clean, cold, and low-sediment conditions brook trout need.

One particularly effective technique is placing trees across the stream. These strategically positioned logs slow the flow of water, trap sediment, and create microhabitats for insect larvae and other aquatic organisms that form the foundation of the trout’s food web.

Last year, a baseline survey was completed to document trout populations, habitat conditions, and



Expanding partnerships are facilitating new water quality projects throughout our region

water quality. This data will serve as a benchmark for monitoring the project’s impact.

A follow-up survey in three years will help measure the success of these improvements and guide future restoration work.

This partnership-driven project demonstrates conservation in action. It reflects the kind of science-based, hands-on work that helps protect our region’s natural heritage and ensures that native brook trout, along with the healthy ecosystems they represent, continue to flourish in local waters for generations to come.

Looking ahead, we plan to expand our focus on stream habitat improvements throughout the region.

We look forward to working with volunteers, community organizations, and conservation partners to enhance additional waterways and ensure that healthy, resilient streams remain part of our shared landscape.



“Through land conservation, we ensure that wildlife has room to thrive — now and in the future.”

— Peter Benson
Jackson, NH

A Place to Call Home

Beavers and the Power of Conservation

As the evening sun peers through the mist, the water over a bog in Chain of Ponds Community Forest, in Madison, NH, remains still. The only sound is the autumn wind rustling through the trees dressed in fall foliage, and the only disturbance to the water’s surface are leaves gently drifting down from above.

After a few moments, more ripples appear, far too large to be caused by any leaf and clearly coming from below. A beaver breaks the surface, beginning its nightly routine.

You watch as it carries sticks across the pond, carefully adding them to its dam. Then, with a few precise nudges and placements, it reinforces weak spots, ensuring that water can continue to pool. This work isn’t just instinct, it’s survival. Beavers build dams to create safe, stable wetlands where they can build lodges, find their partner, and raise their family.

But this kind of natural engineering is increasingly at risk. As development continues to spread across Mount Washington Valley, the habitats that beavers and countless other species rely on are being lost or fragmented.

You’ve probably seen it yourself: When beavers build too close to roads or buildings, their dams can be seen as nuisances, even though the problem isn’t the beavers—it’s the shrinking natural space available to them.

That's only half the story

Given the space to thrive, beavers provide enormous ecological benefits. Their ponds store excess water, helping to reduce flood risks downstream. The wetlands they create become vibrant ecosystems that support fish, amphibians, birds, and plants. These wetlands filter water, store carbon, and build resilience against climate change. In times of drought, these ponds provide critical access for wildlife to water and help replenish groundwater.

But when their habitat disappears, so do these benefits. Displaced beavers can't simply move next door—they lose their homes, and the whole community of life around them unravels.

This beaver, however, doesn't have to worry.

It lives in Chain of Ponds Community Forest, a 625-acre conservation area permanently protected by Upper Saco Valley Land Trust in partnership with the community. Tucked away from development, this preserve provides a sanctuary not only for beavers, but for the rich biodiversity that depends on ponds, wetlands, and undisturbed forests.

This landscape exists because people like you believed it should. Through land conservation, we ensure that wildlife has room to thrive, now and in the future. Every acre protected is a promise that native species can continue their ancient rhythms: building, nesting, foraging, raising their young.

Beavers are not the only ones losing habitat. But with your continued support, they won't be the last ones to find it again.

Let's keep making space for beavers, for nature, and for a future where people and wildlife coexist in balance.

Fascinating Facts About Beavers

Mating & babies: Beavers usually mate in the water between January and March. Females give birth to 2-6 kits (baby beavers) in May or June. Kits weigh between 8 to 24 ounces.

Teamwork with a twist: Both male and female beavers build and maintain dams, but the female usually leads in construction, while the male focuses on inspection and upkeep.

What's for lunch: Beavers snack on the soft inner and outer layers of tree bark. They also eat herbs and aquatic plants. They are surprisingly dexterous, using their front paws to hold their food while eating.

Impressive breath-holding: Beavers can stay underwater for 6-8 minutes at a time.

Lifelong partners: Beavers mate for life. If one partner dies, the surviving beaver will often find a new mate.

Information from the Smithsonian National Zoo.



Chain of Ponds Community Forest Project is on the Horizon

The 626-acre Chain of Ponds Community Forest in Madison, New Hampshire, is nearly yours.

Shaped in the Ice Age, this remarkable landscape features rare plants and dramatic glacial formations, including eskers, bogs, and kettle hole ponds. Together, they comprise much of the headwaters of Silver Lake and the Pequawket Brook. It's a place where loons and owls call, and dreams come true.



Trail planning is now underway, balancing habitat needs with access for all ages and abilities. If all goes well and the funding is in place, construction will start in 2026.

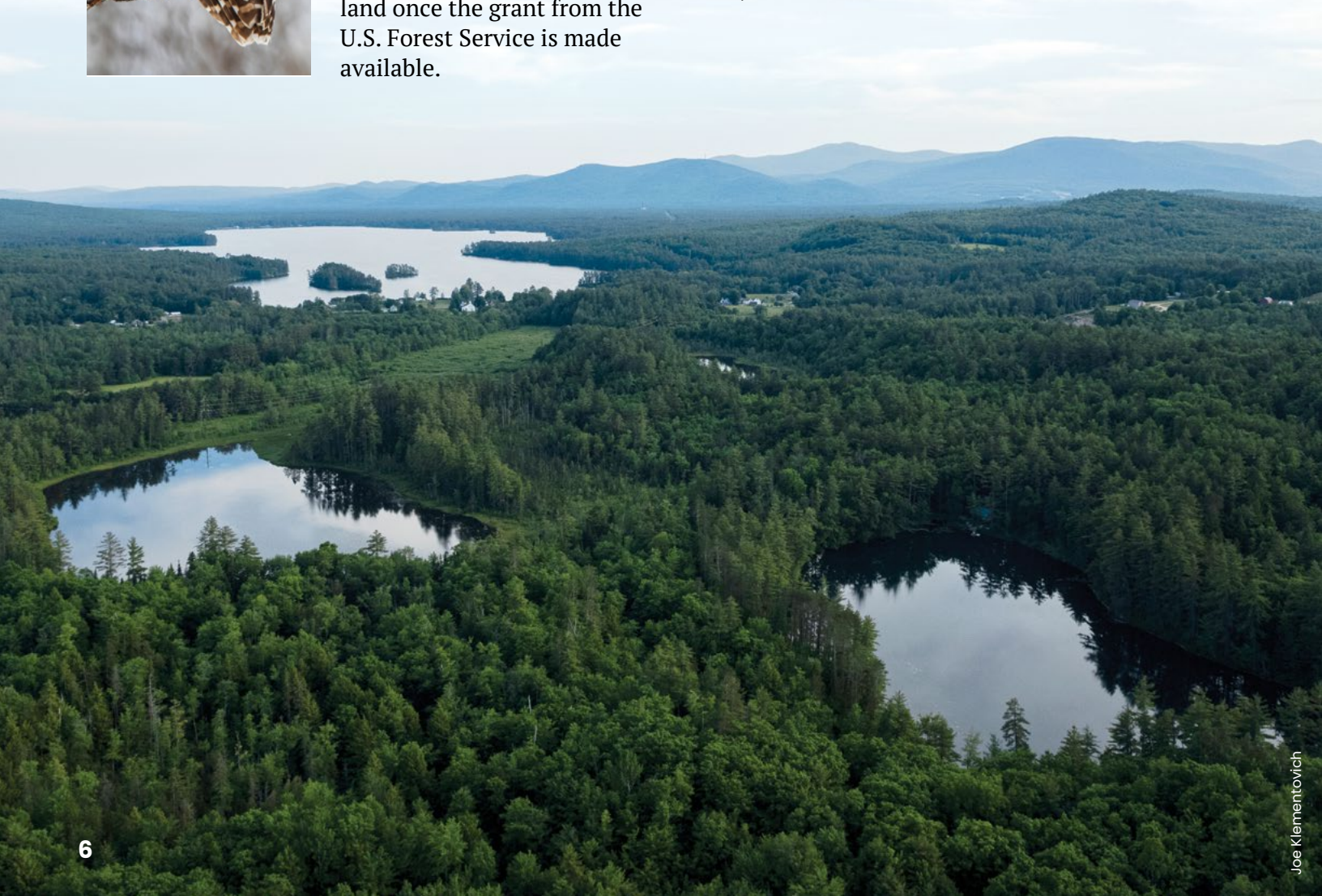
In the coming months, we expect to purchase the land once the grant from the U.S. Forest Service is made available.

Located just 0.6 miles from Madison Elementary School and connected to more than 1,100 acres of other conserved land, it is poised to become a living classroom, wildlife haven, and community hub.

Protecting this forest is important to the health of public and private drinking water supplies, creates outdoor learning opportunities for students, and conserves vital wildlife habitat — from bog plants to birds and fish — that depend on clean, cold water.

Thanks to hundreds of community donors, The Conservation Fund, Town of Madison Conservation Commission, Land and Community Heritage Investment Program (LCHIP), Drinking Water Groundwater Trust Fund, the Davis Foundation, and the U.S. Forest Service, more than \$1.8 million has been raised to purchase and protect this land.

Now, thanks to you, the Chain of Ponds Community Forest will be a place to learn, explore, relax, and connect.





Volunteers of all ages come out year-round to help with trail work. It's a great way to have fun, learn new skills, and build a strong sense of teamwork.

The Most Valuable Gift You Can Give: Time

Volunteers are the bedrock of conservation

You make it possible for trails to stay open, wildlife habitat to thrive, and people of all ages to connect with nature close to home.

Some of you spend a morning trimming brush or clearing a downed tree after a storm.

Others help with community events, photograph wildlife for our newsletters, or pitch in with office projects.

However you help, you're part of a generous circle of people who care deeply about this landscape and one another.



volunteers out on the trails — fun selfies, scenic views, or wildlife encounters — that we can share on social media to celebrate your efforts and encourage others to get involved.

You can also help with outreach and events, welcoming guests, setting up tables, or sharing what conservation means to you.

Volunteering can be as simple as giving a few hours a year or joining us more often. You can come solo, with family and friends, or as a team from your workplace.

There are so many ways to get involved

You might join a trail day at Dundee or Pine Hill Community Forests, help plant trees or remove invasive plants, or lend a hand enhancing trails and maintaining conserved lands.

Prefer something creative? Share your photography or writing skills to inspire others to explore the outdoors. We also love receiving photos from

No experience is needed; just curiosity and a willingness to lend a hand

To all who give your time, energy, and passion, thank you for helping care for the places we love.

Interested in joining in?

Contact Erin Farrell at efarrell@usvlt.org or call 603-662-0008.



Roots That Run Deep

A family's story of love, loss, and land conservation in the Upper Saco River Valley

Deeper than any flower, vegetable, or tree, the strongest roots on some land are those of the families who call it home. For this family, that truth has been passed down through generations like a cherished heirloom.

In the early 1950s, my grandmother, her best friend, and their daughters drove up a nearly abandoned farm road to visit a property her mother (my great-grandmother) once loved.

Years earlier, a fire had destroyed the original home. Only a chimney, old barn, chicken coop, and memories of a once-working farm remained. Heartbroken, my great-grandmother had never returned.

But my grandmother saw something else. Potential.

She dreamed of bringing the land back to life, turning a place of sorrow into joy. So the women camped out, dug a latrine, built a fireplace, cooked over open flames, and hauled water from a

spring. It wasn't easy, but it was healing.

"The girls were enchanted by the land, by the freedom and adventure," the women recalled, "they kept telling their mother (my great-grandmother) they needed to stay.

And stay they did.

Over time the women convinced my great-grandmother to return. They led her to sweeping views of the Valley, through sunlit meadows, and down to the pond for a swim in clear waters.

Slowly, the farm came alive again, and so did her love for it.

Soon after, a new house was built. What was once a site of grief became a home alive with

laughter, gathering, and peace. From then on, generation after generation has returned — to rest, to celebrate, to maintain the house and barn, and to reconnect with nature.

Part of a community

This story is one of many, where families connect deeply to the land. In the Valley, land is more than property. It holds memories, identity, and belonging, and becomes a part of your family, and your family becomes part of the land.

But as development pressures grow, we risk losing more than forests and fields. We risk losing the ties between people and



place, ties that root generations to the land and each other.

The Mount Washington Valley is now one of New Hampshire's most sought-after places to live and visit. Without thoughtful conservation, that popularity could permanently change its character and displace families where the land defines them.

For this family, conserving their land has ensured it will remain a place of peace and connection, whether passed to their children

or shared with a new family who will love it just as deeply.

"Conserving your land is one of the greatest gifts you can give to your family and the community," reflects this landowner.

They're not alone

Today, more than a dozen families in eleven towns are actively exploring land conservation — each one reflecting on how to protect the places they love and uphold their own legacy.

Note: This family shared their story while wishing to remain anonymous. We respect their privacy and are honored to pass their story on to you. The farm in the photo is representative of the farm in the story, but is not the same farm. It has been used with permission by Lucy Brook Farm, protected by USVLT easement.

As Development Pressures Grow, More Families are Turning to Conservation

Whether your goal is to keep land for wildlife, farmland, or forest, or to create opportunities for public access, there are flexible, voluntary options available.

1. Voluntary Conservation Agreement

Also called a conservation easement, this allows you to permanently protect your land while continuing to live on, own, and manage it.

These customized agreements can offer income and estate tax benefits while ensuring the land's natural values are preserved for future generations.

2. Donate Land to Inspire Others

If you'd like others to enjoy the land you've loved, you can donate or sell it to become a public nature preserve.

We'll work with you to balance public access, wildlife habitat, and long-term care.

3. Blended Approaches

Some families combine these options, protecting part of their land with a conservation agreement and donating another portion for public use.

Others donate their land while retaining a life estate or include conservation in their Will.

Let's Talk About What's Right for You

Contact Kate Shambaugh, Conservation Director, at kshambaugh@usvlt.org or 603-662-0008 for a confidential, no-obligation conversation about your land and legacy.



Breathing Joy into Learning

Pine Hill Community Forest Is Helping Students Thrive

It looks like an ordinary school day. Mr. Laughland gathers his students, explains the lesson, and sets them to work. But instead of rows of desks, the classroom is a forest — winding trails, tall trees, and the fresh air of Pine Hill Community Forest.

This 595-acre preserve, owned by Upper Saco Valley Land Trust, wraps around Kennett High School and serves as home base for Outdoor Recreation, a hands-on class where learning takes place in the natural world just beyond school doors. The class builds skills and explores careers that define outdoor, nature-based fields.

Outdoor Recreation addresses a challenge every teacher understands: students struggle to focus when confined indoors all day.

“Some kids do well sitting at a desk,” he explains, “but others need to move, explore, and experience things directly. Having Pine Hill right here makes that possible.”

It’s a feeling many parents and grandparents can relate to; we remember staring out the window in school, daydreaming while the outdoors called to us. For Kennett students, that window has become a doorway.

In the Outdoor Recreation program, students work on trails, learn wilderness first aid, and take on projects that build confidence, resilience, and

practical skills. Research shows that time spent in nature enhances focus, motivation, and social connection. Students in outdoor classrooms often take greater ownership of their learning and feel more engaged in the process.

None of this would be possible without the foresight to conserve Pine Hill.

If the land had been developed or restricted, the program simply couldn’t exist. While some schools occasionally take field trips outdoors, Pine Hill allows immersive, weekly learning experiences that deepen over time.

“You can watch it click for them,” Mr. Laughland says. “A student who might be restless inside suddenly comes alive when they are building a shelter or solving a problem outdoors. They realize they can succeed in ways they did not expect.”

Now, other teachers at Kennett are incorporating Pine Hill into subjects like art, woodshop, and environmental science. And it’s not just a school resource, it’s a space for the whole community to explore, connect, and grow.



Pine Hill is part of a growing national movement. Across the country, land trusts are creating “learning landscapes,” strategically conserved natural areas near schools and community spaces where education and exploration go hand in hand. These places do more than protect land for the future — they help kids thrive today.

Other schools, youth programs, and community organizations are also using nature’s classroom. Both Fryeburg Academy and the Molly Ockett School hold outdoor classes at Jockey Cap.

They recognize that new opportunities to bring joy, a sense of focus, and greater community for young people and people of all ages, is an important part of our collective identity.

As a result, we are exploring a project of this kind with Madison Elementary School, only a half mile from the Chain of Ponds Community Forest, and if funding is completed by early next year, we look forward to sharing more news with you.

As Zenobia Barlow, pioneering conservation educator said, “Children are born with a sense of wonder and an affinity for nature. Properly cultivated, these values can mature into ecological literacy...”

Learning landscapes are how we help ensure that both people and nature thrive for generations to come.

“Children are born with a sense of wonder and an affinity for nature...”

– Zenobia Barlow



Together, We Can Protect More of What We Love

Across the Mount Washington Valley, neighbors are reaching out wanting to protect the places that make this region feel like home—the farms, forests, streams and lakes, overlooks and trails, and the climbing areas that define our community and inspire us every day.

With your partnership, we can meet that call

In the year ahead, you can help strike a balance by ensuring that, as development continues, the places you love are conserved for people and wildlife alike.

Dozens of families are already reaching out, hoping to conserve their land for the future. Each one of these projects represents hours of listening, conversation, and creative problem-solving.

Because of your support, we are able to answer the phone, meet with families, and brainstorm with communities to conserve these places while there is still time.

Each project is a chance to ensure that the Valley's character and beauty endure.

But only if we act together.

Your support makes a real difference

It will help launch trail improvements at the Chain of Ponds Community Forest, creating inclusive, year-round access to nature just minutes from Madison Elementary School.

You will improve public access at Dundee Community Forest, expand trails at Pine Hill, and make these community spaces welcoming for all.

At the same time, your gifts help conserve climate-resilient landscapes, places that protect wildlife, buffer floods, and store rainwater for slow release during droughts, sustaining both nature and our communities for generations.

Every hour you volunteer, every dollar you give, every conversation you spark about conservation, strengthens this shared effort.

The work ahead is bigger than any one organization, and you are at the heart of it. As a community-supported conservation organization, thank you.

Thank you for helping protect what matters — together.





What Better Way to Say You Care

Good things are happening here in the Valley.

People are stepping up to care for the farms, forests, and waterways that make this place home.

And now, there is even more good news:
a local family has offered a special challenge.

We only need 10 new monthly donors by the end of January, and the family will contribute \$2,000 in honor of everyone who joins in.

Monthly giving provides steady, reliable support that helps us plan ahead and respond quickly when land is at risk.

It is one of the most meaningful ways you can help protect the places you love, not just this year but for years to come. Some people donate \$5 a month, others \$1,000. Whatever feels right to you.

As the year comes to a close, there are additional ways to make a difference:

Make a one-time or monthly donation at usvlt.org.

- Give from your IRA or donor-advised fund
- Contribute stock or include a gift in your will
- Donate real estate (a cabin, house, farm, woodlands, etc.) in our area, or elsewhere in the country

Each of these options can be a simple, tax-smart way to support local conservation while ensuring the Valley you love continues to thrive.

Questions? Contact Eric White, Executive Director, at ewhite@usvlt.org or 603-662-0008.

Thank you for being part of this caring community.



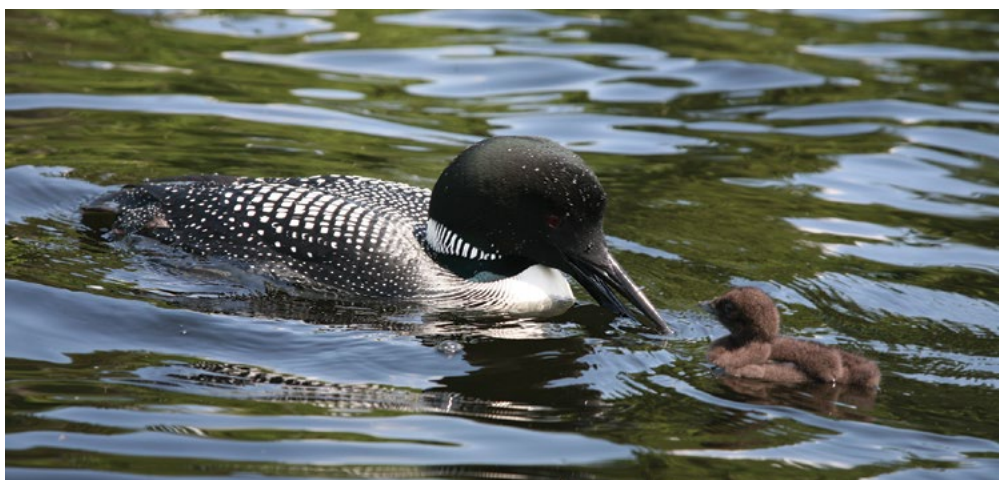
"Every single one of us makes a difference every day – it is up to us as to the kind of difference we make."

– Dr. Jane Goodall



"As a community-supported conservation organization, none of this happens without you."

– Eric White



BUSINESS PARTNERS

Great Beer and a Great Partner

Let's thank our local businesses who care

Local businesses know that the driving force of the community rest in the relationship between land, water, and people.

Saco River Brewing is a perfect example. Great beer starts with clean water, and founder Mason Irish understands that the forests and rivers of the valley are essential not only to the brewery, but to everyone who lives here.

"Our brewery depends on the valley's natural resources," Mason says. "Supporting USVLT is one

way we can say thank you and help protect this place for the future."

That sense of gratitude is why Saco River Brewing partners with us to help conserve land, hosting events such as the Jockey Cap IPA Re-Release Party and Conservation on Tap.

Together, we are raising a glass to protect the places we love. The next time you stop by, be sure to toast Saco River Brewing for caring about the land, the water, and our shared future.



We are also grateful to the more than 20 local businesses that are stepping up to provide services, sponsorships, financial support, and technical expertise.

To see the full list of partners, visit our website. Please thank them when you see them in the community.

A special THANK YOU to these business partners!

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

If you are [interested in becoming a sponsor](#) and helping to facilitate additional conservation, please contact Sam Hanson at shanson@usvlt.org or call (603) 662-0008.

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Swift River Level \$500+

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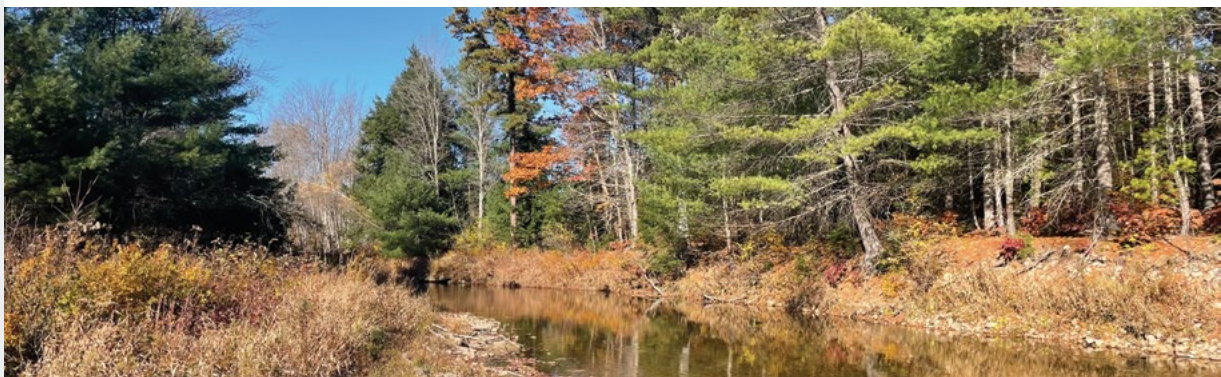
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Upper Saco Valley Land Trust

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We'd love to see you if you're in the area

Please join us, and bring your friends and family to our monthly Explorations.
Join us for two fun upcoming programs this winter:

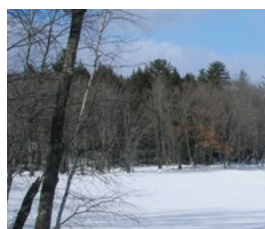


Exploring Simone Preserve

December 6, 2025 • 10:00 – 11:30 am

14-2 Eagle Mountain Road, Jackson, NH

Join us for a guided walk of the Simone Preserve. Tony Simone, who donated the land in 2012, will share stories about the land's history, unique rock formations, rare plants, and his personal connection to this special place.



Chain of Ponds Community Forest Celebration **Anticipated in January or February. TBD.**

For decades the Mount Washington Valley has dreamed of conserving this significant and beautiful land. That vision is now a reality. Join us to celebrate this remarkable achievement and share your ideas for its future.

Programs are free, thanks to community support.

Programs are held weather permitting. Space may be limited.



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