



Spring • Summer 2026
Newsletter
& 2025 Annual Report



*The choices we make today
shape the future of wildlife and
our community. By protecting what
matters now, we leave a legacy
that endures beyond our time.*

Finding Peace in the Valley

There are moments in my work when I think, “How are we going to make this happen?” Other times it’s simply, “Take a breath. We can do this.”

I suspect most of us have moments like that, even if we don’t always say it out loud. Moments of doubt are part of being human. In conservation, those moments come up more often than you might expect.

Last year, we conserved four remarkable properties, including the 626-acre Chain of Ponds Community Forest. Each project came with its own hurdles. An unexpected deadline. A concerned neighbor. A missing form. More than once, I caught myself thinking, “Oh nuts, what can go wrong now?”

And then, I go for a walk.

Sometimes I head to Redstone or Pequawket in Conway and Albany. Other times I find my way to Chain of Ponds, Albany Town Forest, Fryeburg Town Forest, or Dundee. Out there, in the open fields, forests, and streams, the places where wildlife moves through the seasons, something begins to shift.

My breathing slows. The mental clutter clears. In its place is something steadier — a sense of awe. Hope.

These places remind me that this work is bigger than any hurdle. They are lands where people spend time together, where stories are made, memories built, and where we can step away from the noise of daily life. They are places that ground us. We all need that.

And in that grounding, doubt loosens its grip.

Walking these lands reminds me that while the challenges are temporary, what we protect together lasts.

It’s a privilege to do this work alongside a staff, board, and community that care so deeply about this place. I’m grateful for the chance to protect it with you, piece by piece.



If you find yourself slipping into doubt or feeling the weight of the world, I hope you’ll take a walk and let the Valley do what it does so well.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Eric White".

Eric White
Executive Director

“Walking these lands reminds me that while the challenges are temporary, what we protect together lasts.”



Jennifer Bosvert

The Chickadee's Call Reminds Us Why Protected Land Matters

On a cold morning, the familiar “chick-a-dee-dee-dee” carries through the trees. The black-capped chickadee stays here year-round, relying on forests, wetlands, and sheltered edges to find food, nest, and survive the winter.

That small bird points to something bigger.

Chickadees are also symbols of healthy forests. Chickadees form long-term pair bonds, nesting each year to the same trees and places, and often to your backyard feeders. Their persistence depends on lands that remain stable and protected. In many ways they reflect the seasonal rhythms and the space nature needs to carry on.

Across our region, resident wildlife and migrating birds depend on connected habitats. Warblers traveling thousands of miles, along with woodpeckers, nuthatches, thrushes, and even bobcats, depend on a linked web of forests, wetlands, and open spaces.

According to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, North America has lost nearly 3 billion birds since 1970, largely due to habitat loss and environmental change. While chickadees are still doing relatively well, many birds struggle as habitats become fragmented.

Conserved lands help hold these spaces together.

Places like the Chain of Ponds Community Forest, Pequawket Pond Preserve, and Fryeburg Town Forest provide essential habitat, and also places where people walk, listen, and experience nature close to home.

The choices we make today shape the future of wildlife and our community. By protecting what matters now, we leave a legacy that endures beyond our time.

Did You Know?

Birdwatching is fun and research has documented that it's also linked to your well-being:

- **Birds can lift your spirits.** Studies suggest simply seeing or hearing birds in nature can reduce stress and boost your feelings of well-being.
- **Your ears get smarter too.** Learning to recognize calls and songs strengthens your auditory memory and listening skills.
- **Birders become pattern experts.** Shape, behavior, habitat, and season — birdwatchers constantly compare clues, sharpening your brain's pattern-recognition ability.
- **A little mindfulness with wings.** Birdwatching encourages you to slow down, breathe, and notice the moment, like meditation, just with feathers. It's a great way to spend time with kids and family.

Check out our website for places to go. Information from 2022 articles in the British publication *Scientific Reports*, researchers at King's College London, and the 2026 *Journal of Neuroscience*.



Dan Lucy

“Our family has cared for this land for a long time. Conserving it feels like the right way to make sure it could stay a farm and remain part of the Valley we love.”

– Nat Lucy

Valley Farms, Cherished Lands

In the shadow of Cathedral Ledge in Bartlett, nestled among white pines, a wooden building with a bright red roof catches the eye. A simple sign reads: “Pure Maple Syrup.” To passersby, it’s a familiar sugar shack. But to those who know, this land tells a deeper story rooted in time, memory, and care.

For hundreds — indeed thousands — of years, people have lived in this Valley, shaping and caring for the land. Long before the area became a destination, local children roamed these woods freely, bushwhacking their way to Diana’s Baths to cool off in its cascading pools — back when the path was only known to locals.

Yet this farm is not only a story about the past. Today’s farm families are shaping agriculture’s future here. In partnership with the Upper Saco Valley Land Trust, they are working to permanently conserve farms, ensuring that the fields, forests, and sugar maples remain part of the Valley’s landscape for generations to come.

“Our family has cared for this land for a long time,” says family member Nat Lucy. “For our family, conserving a portion of our farm in 2024 felt like the right thing to do, and would help make sure it would stay a farm and remain part of the Valley we love.”

Why Farms Like This Matter

Farms like this are more than scenic backdrops. They are essential to the Valley’s character. Open fields beneath mountain peaks, sugar maples tapped each spring, and working lands reflect a living agricultural heritage. They connect people to place and remind us that this landscape has always been beautiful and productive.

“When people think about what makes this Valley special, farms are a big part of the picture,” reflected Kate Shambaugh, Conservation Director. “These farms connect us to our history and remind us that this Valley has always been a working landscape.”



Lucy Family tapping trees at the Fred Lucy Sugar Orchard. 1970.



Their importance extends deeper — beneath the soil itself. Farms like these sit near the headwaters of the Saco River, where rain and snowmelt filter through the ground before feeding streams, wells, and waterways that flow to the Maine coast. Open farmland plays a quiet but critical role in absorbing stormwater and protecting clean water across the watershed.

Looking Toward the Next Generation

Across New England, rising land values and the high cost of farming are putting increasing pressure on working lands. Too often, farmland is sold and divided, making it difficult for future generations to continue farming.

Conservation offers another path. By limiting development while keeping land in private ownership, it helps farms remain viable and adaptable while protecting their core purpose.

Today, this conserved farm stands as a quiet but powerful example of what's possible when communities and conservation partners work together to protect both the land, and a way of life.

With your support, more farms like this can be protected, keeping fields open, water clean, and this Valley's farming future alive for generations to come.

As Development Pressure Grows, 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 603-662-0008 or kshambaugh@usvlt.org for a confidential, no-obligation conversation about your land and legacy.





Annual Report &

Last Year Was Amazing

This coming year will be too

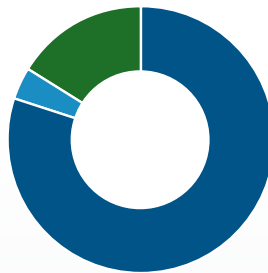
2025 was a milestone year for local conservation and the Upper Saco Valley Land Trust. We celebrated our 25th anniversary and conserved four spectacular new properties, including bringing to life a vision more than two decades in the making: the Chain of Ponds Community Forest.

Conservation doesn't happen by accident. As a community-supported organization, none of this happens without you. Because of you, iconic lands and special places are protected and cared for, wildlife has safe habitat, and local farms remain accessible. Families and visitors alike can explore, connect, and create lasting memories in nature.

We are grateful to all of the volunteers, supporters, municipal partners, foundations, sponsors and business partners who make it possible to conserve and care for these places.

This year, eleven people have joined as new monthly donors, further strengthening a foundation of consistent, dedicated support that sustains this work year-round. We appreciate their recognition that “when the going gets tough,” the monthly donors give us a reason to smile.

We live in a world that rarely slows down. Yet, through your commitment to conservation, these lands remain places of peace, reflection, and connection for all who seek them.



Revenue 2025

■ Contributions & Grants.....	\$ 401,070
■ Investment Income ..	\$ 18,399
■ Other.....	\$ 80,349

Total Revenue \$499,818



Expenses 2025

■ Program.....	\$ 282,958
■ Core Mission Support.....	\$ 96,320
■ Fundraising	\$ 127,668

Total Expenses \$506,946

Numbers are the total revenue and expenses including unrestricted, Board restricted, and donor restricted funds.

The above revenues and expenditures in 2025 include some of the funds raised and spent for the purchase and project completion of the Chain of Ponds Community Forest. For an audited statement of our financials, please refer to our 990s.

Highlights

USVLT By The Numbers in 2025

You made it possible for the conservation of several amazing places that will now be here for generations to come. *Thank you.*

24 Nature Preserves

3,807 Acres

Lands are protected for wildlife, open for public access, education, and recreation

65 Conserved Lands with Local Families

9,155 Acres

These lands continue to be privately owned and protected

12,962 Total Acres Conserved

Special Thank You

A special thank you to those who have remembered our land trust in their will

One of the most meaningful ways to support land conservation is through a gift in your will. Simpler than many realize, every gift, no matter the size, protects the land in this Valley. If helpful, we offer sample language on our website, to make the process easier.

To honor this commitment, we are launching the Silver Maple Legacy Circle. Including Upper Saco Valley Land Trust in your will makes you part of a community dedicated to protecting the land, water, and way of life we all love.

If you've already taken this step, we would be grateful to hear from you — so we can thank you personally and welcome you to the Silver Maple Legacy Circle.



**Kismet Students
Climbing Jockey Cap
Last Fall**

9



**Kennett Students in
Outdoor Recreation Class
Studying at Pine Hill
Community Forest**

45



**Volunteer Monitors
Stewarding Property
Last Year**

30



**Memories Made by
Climbers, Bikers, Hunters,
Skiers, and Explorers**

Endless



**Impact of Conserving
Your Land
Irreplaceable**



More Than a Climb at Jockey Cap

There is a moment, just before you reach the top of Jockey Cap in Fryeburg, when the forest falls away.

The trail fades, the granite opens beneath your feet, and suddenly the Valley stretches out below you – wide, quiet, and full of light.

For generations, people have made their way up this small but mighty peak. Maybe you've climbed it yourself – for the view, to explore Molly Ockett's Cave, or simply to stand on stone shaped long before you.

Perhaps you remember visiting as a child. And if you've been there recently, you may have noticed the thoughtful trail improvements making the path more welcoming and accessible.

But something new is happening here, too.

An Afternoon. A Lifetime of Memories

On a warm afternoon, voices rise from the ledges below with encouragement, laughter, and the steady rhythm of effort.



Locally conserved lands like Jockey Cap play an increasingly important role for youth. Students from the Kismet Rock Foundation climb at Jockey Cap, discovering confidence, teamwork, and a connection to the outdoors.

Led by instructors from the Kismet Rock Foundation — a nonprofit introducing children across New England to climbing to build confidence, connection, and resilience — students take their first climb.

One step, then another. Hands search for holds. Feet test the stone. What begins with hesitation slowly turns to determination.

These ledges are a place where connections to the outdoors begin. And for many students, this is their first time climbing real stone.

“Climbing has a way of bringing out strengths kids didn’t know they had,” one instructor explains. “They start by thinking the wall is impossible. Then they begin to figure it out move by move. By the time they reach the top, you can see their confidence growing.”

The barriers can be as real as the rock itself — equipment, transportation, access, instruction. Some have traveled from across New England. Others live nearby. But most have never had the chance to experience something like this.

At Jockey Cap and with Kismet, those barriers begin to fall away

A student pauses midway, clinging to the granite, unsure of the next move. Below a voice calls up, calm and certain: “You’ve got this.” And, they do. They shift their weight, find their hold, and continue. Confidence takes root. Trust in themselves, in the rope, in the people below.

“What makes climbing special is that you don’t do it alone,” another instructor says. “You have to trust the person holding the rope, and they have to trust you. That kind of teamwork builds friendships quickly.”

One student put it simply: “[Kismet] taught me I love rock climbing, and showed me how to be more vocal in a handful of ways,” one student shared. “I will never forget the sense of community I felt here.”

Protected Places Create Lasting Bonds

Places like Jockey Cap make these moments possible. Protected through a partnership between the Town of Fryeburg and the Upper Saco Valley Land Trust, this landmark remains open not just for recreation, but for discovery.



The impact doesn't end when they climb back down. It lingers — in muscle memory, newfound strength, in the quiet knowledge that something once impossible can be overcome.

“[Kismet] taught me I love rock climbing, and showed me how to be more vocal in a handful of ways. I will never forget the sense of community I felt here.”

– Student Climber

Young people find confidence here. Friendships form in the space between uncertainty and courage. The outdoors become something they belong to.

When more land across the Valley is conserved, more opportunities like this can take root.

As Katrina Meserve, Executive Director of Kismet Rock Foundation, puts it, “Conserved land is a community resource. Protected climbing areas like Jockey Cap, Cathedral Ledge, and Whitehorse Ledge allow [people] access to some of the country’s most iconic granite.”



A Forest Preserved, A Community Connected

Trail Work Coming Soon to Dundee Community Forest

Among tall grasses curling around artfully placed stones, the first signs of spring begin to stir. Mint and oregano push through thawing ground, mingling with early wildflowers.

In the distance, the last skiers of the season weave through the trees, their laughter echoing through the forest. Deeper in the woods, a black bear, newly awake from winter, scratches against the bark of a tree.

This is Dundee Community Forest, a place where both people and wildlife find room to thrive.

Not long ago, the future of this land was uncertain. Like many special places, its fate depended on a rare alignment of community support, strong partnerships, and a shared commitment to conservation.

In 2023, that vision became reality. Working with the towns of Jackson and Bartlett, along with local, state, and federal partners, more than 1,250 acres of forests, fields, wetlands, and streams were permanently protected.

Places like this are increasingly unusual, and conserving Dundee required everything to come together at the right moment.

Community donors, conservation organizations, and public funding all played a role in ensuring this landscape would remain intact for wildlife, clean water, and future generations.

The vision for Dundee is deeply rooted in community involvement. An advisory committee, representing a range of local perspectives, helps guide how the forest is managed and shared.

The forest itself tells stories that stretch back generations. Old stone walls trace former farm fields. Open meadows and wetlands shape the terrain, while streams wind quietly through the understory. Towering white pines rise above the canopy, sheltering birds like great horned owls, while larger mammals move through the woods as part of their natural range.

Nearby, the historic Ham House, an 1830s Cape, stands as a reminder of the people who once



lived and worked this land. Preserved as part of the project, it is being restored by the dedicated volunteers known as the Ham Hocs — continuing a long relationship between community and land.

Caring for the Land

Since Dundee was conserved, the focus has shifted to caring for this ecosystem. Early assessments identified invasive plant species limiting native vegetation. In response, the natural resource management company Redstart has been engaged to develop a plan to restore balance and resilience.

A forest management plan also guides long-term stewardship — supporting biodiversity, protecting water resources, and helping the forest adapt to a changing climate. As warming conditions bring new pressures, including pests and disease, active management will play an increasingly important role.

Opening the Forest to the Community

While much of this work happens quietly, another effort is underway: preparing Dundee to be thoughtfully shared with the community.

As funding is secured, plans are moving forward to welcome visitors while protecting sensitive

habitats. A small parking area has been added, and thoughtfully designed trails and signage will help people explore the forest responsibly.

As access is gradually introduced, Dundee Community Forest will become a place of quiet discovery, where people can walk, observe seasonal changes, and reconnect with the land.

A Place for Wildlife and Community

Yet even as access improves, the heart of Dundee remains unchanged. It is, first and foremost, a place for nature, where ecosystems can function, native plants flourish, wildlife roam, and clean water flows.

Dundee is a reminder that conservation is never the work of one person or organization. This forest exists because a community came together to protect something larger than itself.

This conservation effort was made possible through the support of community donors, in partnership with the Trust for Public Land, state and federal conservation programs, and others committed to protecting special places. It is a reminder that conserving land is always a shared effort.

Honoring Those You Love Through the Land

There's often no better way to say how much you care than with a gift made in honor or memory of someone special.

It's a tribute that lasts forever, while helping protect the lands they loved for generations to come.

When you make a memorial or honorary gift, we not only send you a thank you letter, but we also reach out to their family to let them know you remembered them in such a thoughtful way.

These gifts become part of a lasting legacy rooted in connection, remembrance, and their love of the land.

In Memory of

Joseph Berry

Peter & Emily Benson
Roger & Wendy LaPointe
Ms. Janice Crawford
American Resort
Development Association
RCI, LLC
Renaë Deming
Michelle Skowron
Michael Cremeno
Leone, McDonnell & Roberts, P.A.
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Jean & James Hodgins

Joke Russell

Forrest Russell

Barrett R. Lucas

Dana Lucas

Rich Osada

Dulcie L. Heiman

Robert Redford

James F. Hill Jr.

Four Easy Ways to Support Land Conservation in the Valley

There are many ways to support the conservation of places we all cherish.

As a community-supported conservation organization, we're grateful for every gift whether it's through checks or monthly donations, or strategic tax-savvy options. Here are four meaningful ways people donate:

Monthly Donations

Ongoing monthly donations helps us respond quickly when conservation opportunities arise and keeps our land stewardship strong year-round. Some people donate \$5 per month, while others give more than \$100. Whatever is right for you is appreciated.

Gifts of Stock

Donating appreciated stocks, bonds, or mutual funds can help you avoid capital gains taxes and, if you itemize deductions, may provide an income tax deduction while supporting conservation.

Donor Advised Fund

Donor advised funds are investment accounts set up for the sole purpose of supporting charitable organizations. They can be a tax-savvy way to support the wildlife, forests, farms and waterways of the Upper Saco Valley.

Gifts In Your Will

A planned gift ensures your love of the land lives on. Naming the Upper Saco Valley Land Trust as a beneficiary, is often simpler than expected and helps you protect this special place for generations. Let us know to join the new Silver Maple Legacy Circle.

If you have questions, we're always happy to talk through your options and help you find the approach that's right for you.



Neville Bourguet



Amont:90

“Children need wild places to be whole.”
– David Sobel, author of *Children’s Special Places, Place-Based Education*



Alex Islas



Mark Fraser



James W. Thompson

From Backyard Trails to Community Trails

Long before the trails at Pine Hill welcomed bike riders, there were smaller, hand-built paths winding through the woods behind a childhood home in Maine.

That's where it began for Rob Adair.

As a kid, he and his brother built tree forts and carved simple trails through the forest. No plans. Just curiosity and the satisfaction of making something with their hands.

Years later, after buying his first mountain bike, Rob faced a familiar problem: not enough places to ride. So he started building trails again.

That instinct to create and contribute led him to the Upper Saco Valley Land Trust. In the early 2000s, while serving on the Conway Conservation Commission, a friend casually suggested he try volunteering — and it stuck.

“A friend once told me that we can choose to be observers or contributors,” Rob says. “Being a contributor is far more rewarding.”

What started as a single step grew into years. Rob has helped build and maintain trails at places like Pine Hill and Jockey Cap. Places now widely used and deeply valued. Some days involve detailed trail design. Other days are simpler: clearing brush, or digging drainage alongside new friends.



“A friend once told me that we can choose to be observers or contributors. Being a contributor is far more rewarding.”

In 2025, Rob received the Upper Saco Valley Land Trust's Outstanding Volunteer Award, although he notes that recognition isn't the point.

It's the people he meets and the shared pride in knowing you helped create something lasting that's meaningful.

A few hours of volunteering can become a trail where families walk and kids explore.

“You don't have to be an expert,” Rob says. “You learn as you go.”

That's the heart of volunteering with Upper Saco Valley Land Trust — showing up, pitching in and doing something meaningful.

And somewhere along the way, a path appears — not just through the woods, but through the community.



VOLUNTEERS

USVLT Heart & Soul

Looking to make a difference — and have fun along the way? Volunteering is a great place to start.

No experience needed. Just a willingness to help.

Pitch in at trail cleanup days, pulling invasive plants, take photos, or join a committee.

There's a place for everyone. Reach out to Erin Farrell at efarrell@usvlt.org or call our office to find what feels right for you.

BUSINESS PARTNERS

Trails, Talent, and Local Commitment

HEB Engineers may be known for its work on bridges, roads, and surveying, but what truly defines the company is its deep roots to the Upper Saco Valley.

Founded by engineers who grew up exploring the region’s mountains, forests and rivers, HEB believes engineering works in harmony with the land and supports both the built and natural environments.

That philosophy makes them a natural partner of the Upper Saco Valley Land Trust. As a Saco River-level business partner, HEB contributes not only financially but also through pro bono expertise. Their team supports trail accessibility planning, watershed assessments, and

conservation projects, always with long-term stewardship in mind.

Most recently, HEB played a key role in conserving the Chain of Ponds Community Forest in Madison, providing boundary surveying and marking services for the 626-acre property. Projects like this reflect a shared commitment to protecting open space while preserving ecological integrity.

For HEB, giving back to the Valley that shaped them is central to their mission. Their work is an investment in the region’s future



— helping ensure these lands remain accessible and intact.

As HEB President Jay Poulin puts it, “In the end, it’s about preserving the places that shaped us — and making sure they endure for those who follow.”

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@usvlat.org or call (603) 662-0008.

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Swift River Level \$500+

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owlet by Karen Hogan.

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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 fun upcoming programs this spring and summer, visit uvslt.org.

Birding at Chain of Ponds

Tuesday, June 2, 2026

Chain of Ponds Community Forest • Forest Pines Road
Madison NH

Join avid birders Rick Steber and Anne Pillion for guided tour of the unique avian landscape at Chain of Ponds. This outing highlights a thriving wetland and forest habitat that many birds call home.



Ian Dewar



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A Special Note of Appreciation

We are grateful to HEB Engineers, Inc. for helping underwrite this newsletter. Their support makes it possible to reach more people in the community and to be available for conversations about conserving land and connecting people to the places they care about.

HEB is an award-winning firm providing civil engineering, structural engineering, and surveying services throughout northern New England. HEB is built upon the pillars of integrity, expertise, community, and communication. Local companies like HEB are making a difference.



If you or a company want to help underwrite future newsletters, let us know.