

U P P E R  
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T R U S T



*Preserving Land for Community Benefit*

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ANNUAL REPORT  
**2020**



## Preserving Land for Community Benefit

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

USVLT serves northern Carroll County in New Hampshire and western Oxford County in Maine.

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**Cover Photo:**  
*Dundee Forest by Jerry & Marcy Monkman, Ecophotography, courtesy of the Trust for Public Land*

**This page:**  
*USVLT Board of Directors photo by Mike Dana*

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# PRESIDENT & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

*Thank you* – two words not spoken often enough. Never has it seemed as important to say them, to acknowledge our many gifts, whether of friends, family, or the landscape that has sustained us. We also offer deep gratitude to you, our members and supporters, for being personally invested in the work we do.



Your vote of confidence was essential in 2020. The still-unfolding global pandemic disrupted every aspect of our lives. But there are silver linings. We examined long-held assumptions about Land Trust work processes, reconfigured standard operating procedures, and developed streamlined ways to work together, while apart.

The organization has also taken a deep dive into examining institutional racism and white privilege, and is grappling with what (and who) we mean by “community,” a word sprinkled throughout our mission statement and outreach materials (see page 2-3).

After office operations went remote in March, Zoom became our meeting room, and yet USVLT persevered to close on four long-awaited land projects in 2020: the World Fellowship Center easements in Albany, the Hill Family Preserve in Eaton, and the conservation of Old Blake Farm in Brownfield and of Lucy Brook Farm in Conway. For land project details, see page 4-5.

Finally, the Land Trust turned 20 last fall, amidst political upheaval and surging COVID cases. Events to celebrate this milestone were cancelled, as was the public announcement of the *20 Years & Onward* campaign, a multi-million-dollar capital initiative. While the initial campaign work was temporarily “shelved” for several months in 2020, we are now back on track and gaining momentum.

*20 Years & Onward* will lay the groundwork for USVLT’s future conservation initiatives. As of this publication, more than 80% of our ambitious \$6 million goal is accounted for, thanks to several large government grants and the incredible generosity of local individuals and foundations. Please see the insert for campaign details, and consider joining the effort if you haven’t yet pledged. With you, our next 20 years of conserving land for community benefit is off to a great start, pandemic be damned.

Doug Burnell, President

William Abbott, Executive Director



# A SHIFT OF PERSPECTIVE

2020 was a year like no other. It tested assumptions and tried our spirits. While the calendar year is behind us, much of its strife, turmoil, violence, and suffering is indelibly imprinted in our minds.

At the same time, there were myriad moments of individuals rising to the occasion, stepping up against unparalleled challenges to effect positive change, achieving simple acts of human kindness, or putting themselves in harm's way to save others.

As any semblance of normalcy slipped away, adaptability and resilience emerged as the calling cards for success. Those very same qualities align with what allows the natural world to maintain a sense of equilibrium. In the pandemic, folks took to the woods, to hike, ski, bike, or simply walk in a quiet space to draw a breath.

2020 was an opportunity for the Land Trust to adapt as well. We have looked at long-held assumptions through a different lens, shifted into new work-life patterns, and embraced never anticipated opportunities.

In June, thanks to Board member Lindsay Kafka and USVLT Land Steward Peter Howe, a committee was launched to focus on justice, equity, diversity and inclusion. A list of resources was compiled that point out, unequivocally, the intersections between conservation and injustices experienced by BIPOC (Black, Indigenous & People of Color) communities. This work has been an “unravelling” of sorts, peeling back the layers of the stories we tell ourselves, opening ourselves up to different possibilities and perspectives. Cases in point:

Why do those interpretive signs we installed just last year only talk about history from a European settlement perspective? What were the Abenaki place names in this part of our service area? Why are indigenous communities recognized and celebrated more in Maine than in New Hampshire? What happened *here*?

The work has just begun. A strategic-planning Board retreat is on tap for this fall to reassess the Land Trust's mission statement, which has been both our beacon and keel for the past 20 years. But the sea under us has changed, and community needs have changed along with it.

The current mission statement focuses on “natural and human communities.” But a key question has emerged, due in part to the crush of new visitors to our natural-resource-rich service area during 2020: what do we mean—or better, *who* do we mean—when we say “community?” Like every land manager in New Hampshire and Maine, we are grappling with parking and public access issues. Answering that question, and developing holistic solutions, requires a sense of perspective, acknowledging that USVLT has been stewarding land but 20 short years. We must recognize that our Anglo-Saxon land laws (which enable the concept of conservation easements in the first place!), and our resulting land ownership patterns, have been here for 400 years—a mere eyelash-width on the timescale of ecological process.

Our iconic landscape is beloved. Each resident, second-home owner, long-time visitor and newcomer alike absorbs cherished moments: the alpenglow on the side of Washington, the striking green fields in the Intervale, the clear waters of the Saco, and outdoor time with friends and family. Those experiences create a sense of belonging, and of ownership. Our fields, forests and mountain trails have legions of “owners.” The collective challenge ahead is how to share this landscape with our collective communities, without damaging it.

Whether through a purchased or donated easement, or the gift of property in fee, land

# 2020 PROJECTS

protection requires patience; sometimes projects are years in the making. The Land Trust closed on four such undertakings in 2020, as highlighted here.

*2020's projects were made possible through the generous support of many municipal, state, federal and private grants: the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service's Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, NH's Drinking Water and Groundwater Trust Fund, the NH State Conservation Commission "Moose Plate" Grant, the Town of Conway, the NH Land and Community Heritage Investment Program, NH's Aquatic Resource Mitigation Program, the William P. Wharton Trust, the Davis Conservation Foundation, anonymous family foundations, and donor-advised funds of the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation.*



## LUCY BROOK FARM

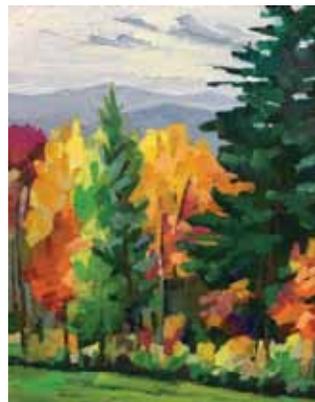
USVLT concluded the purchase of a conservation easement on the Gaudette family's Lucy Brook Farm in November of 2020. Near the foot of Cathedral Ledge, the property includes over 3,000 feet of frontage along Lucy Brook and the Saco River, important agricultural

soils over a high-yield aquifer and connectivity to other conserved lands. This easement ensures that the farm will remain intact moving forward.

"We offer our profound thanks to all the funders who made this project happen, as well as to the Gaudette family for their generosity and patience," said USVLT President Doug Burnell. "We first started talking with the Gaudettes more than four years ago about their options and future vision for their land. The conservation of their iconic farm is finally a reality, and it is now protected as farmland for generations to come, in perpetuity."

## THE HILL FAMILY PRESERVE

In August of 2020, USVLT gratefully accepted ownership of 214 acres of pristine forest on Paul Hill Road in Eaton, gifted by the extended Hill family. The forest adds to an impressive patchwork quilt of conservation land in South Eaton, including nearby property protected by USVLT on Foss Mountain, the 123-acre Uplands Apple Farm conservation easement granted to the Land Trust in 2007, the 246-acre Paul Hill Road Preserve (given to the Land Trust in 2010), as well as more than a thousand acres of abutting Town Forest.



"We wish to extend our gratitude to George, Helene, Jim, Sarah, and the rest of the Hill family for their generosity and vision of a sustainable future," said USVLT Executive Director William Abbott. "The property truly is a gem, lovingly cared for during the past five decades. We intend to honor this gift by continuing their excellent forest stewardship."

## THE OLD BLAKE FARM

The historic 95-acre Old Blake Farm, on Old County Road in Brownfield, Maine, has been owned jointly for nearly 50 years by four separate families, who in 2020 donated an easement to USVLT. The original Blake Family farmhouse is still onsite, having survived the Brownfield Fire of 1947, as is the Blake Neighborhood Cemetery.



Over the decades, the farm's woodlands have been managed sustainably, a legacy which will continue under the conservation easement terms.

"From the time we purchased our property 50 years ago, we intended to preserve and conserve the land as wildlife habitat, ecologically managed forests, and a retreat and creative gathering place for family and friends," stated the owners in making their gift. "We now believe those long-term goals can best be realized by working with the Upper Saco Valley Land Trust."



## WORLD FELLOWSHIP CENTER

In June 2020, the World Fellowship Center granted three separate conservation easements to USVLT to permanently protect nearly 400 acres of its campus in Albany. The easements, which include more than 3,000 feet of frontage on Back Pond and Whitton Pond, complement abutting and nearby properties conserved by The Nature Conservancy and NH Audubon, and ensure the permanent protection of nearly all of Whitton Pond's shoreline. The easement areas also boast 70 acres of highest-ranked habitat as determined by the NH Wildlife Action Plan, 17 acres of wetlands, and more than 1,000 feet of frontage on the Chocorua River.

The World Fellowship Center has been an exemplary steward of these fields, waterbodies and forests for the past 77 years. The easements held by USVLT will ensure that the land's natural resources are preserved consistently, forever.

*Some of the residents of Lucy Brook Farm, photo by Cheryl Senter, courtesy of the NH Charitable Foundation; Jennifer Van Cor, Uplands Farm II, Art Celebrates Place 2018; Old Blake Farm photo by Meghan Moody; socially distant "closing" for the World Fellowship Center easements with Co-Director Andrea Walsh and Doug Burnell, USVLT President.*

# FINANCIAL REPORT

(Year Ended December 31, 2020 — Unaudited)

## COMBINED STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES

	Unrestricted	Temporarily Restricted	Total
<b>REVENUE:</b>			
Membership Contributions	\$ 89,552	\$ -	\$ 89,552
Grants and Donations	79,297	2,406,643	2,485,940
Other	61,267	-	61,267
Net Assets Released from Restrictions	616,773	(616,773)	-
<b>Total Operating Revenue</b>	<b>\$846,889</b>	<b>\$1,789,870</b>	<b>\$2,636,759</b>
<b>EXPENSES:</b>			
Program Services:			
Land Protection & Easement Acquisition	\$ 678,817	\$ -	\$ 678,817
Land Stewardship	60,958	-	60,958
Total Program Services	739,775	-	739,775
Management and General	73,196	-	73,196
Fundraising	10,022	-	10,022
<b>Total Operating Expenses</b>	<b>822,993</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>822,993</b>
<b>Change in Net Assets</b>	<b>\$23,896</b>	<b>\$ 1,789,870</b>	<b>\$1,813,766</b>

## COMBINED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

	Unrestricted	Temporarily Restricted	Permanently Restricted	Total
<b>ASSETS:</b>				
Cash, Unrestricted	\$191,148	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 191,148
Cash, Restricted	-	1,166,962	-	1,166,962
Receivables	11,008	527,225	-	538,233
Prepaid Expenses	3,968	-	-	3,968
Beneficial Interest Held by Others	-	-	245,658	245,658
Non Current Assets	-	424,231	-	424,231
Property & Equipment, net	107,202	-	-	107,202
Land & Conservation Easements	-	-	2,103,342	2,103,342
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>\$313,226</b>	<b>\$ 2,118,418</b>	<b>\$2,349,000</b>	<b>\$4,780,744</b>
<b>LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS:</b>				
Accrued Expenses	\$25,481	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 25,481
Net Assets	287,845	2,118,418	2,349,000	4,775,263
<b>Total Liabilities and Net Assets</b>	<b>\$313,326</b>	<b>\$ 2,118,418</b>	<b>\$2,349,000</b>	<b>\$4,780,744</b>

Unrestricted funds may be used for day to day operations. Temporarily restricted funds are grants and donations for a specific project or purpose to be used in the future. Permanently restricted assets include land, easements and stewardship endowment. Non Current Assets represent Pledges that are receivable after one year.



Winter Birch/Melanie Barash Levitt

While 2020 was a year of unprecedented challenges, USVLT emerged on sound financial footing, thanks to the overwhelming support of our members. Even as we were still setting up remote work plans, donors were calling to offer financial help to weather the storm.

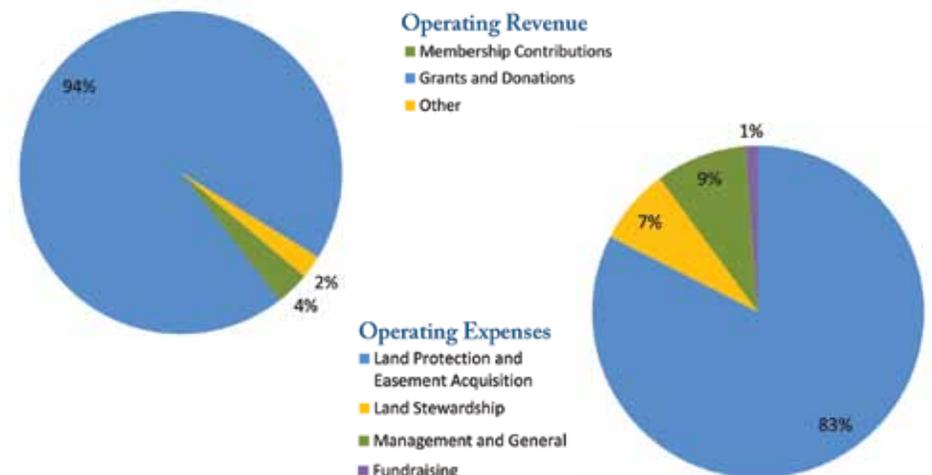
USVLT's financial structure has three segments: Operations (including payroll, rent, and outreach); Special Projects (primarily land and easement acquisition), and Investments (funds to ensure long-term stability and to respond to conservation opportunities).

The evolving pandemic immediately impacted Operations, forcing the cancellation of 2020's major community-building and fundraising events, including Art Celebrates Place and Fields on the Saco. Still, with the help of higher-than-expected member donations and government grants, we closed the books on 2020 ahead of projections.

Through the Payroll Protection Program, a \$35,000 loan was secured and then converted to a grant by year's end. Additionally, a state grant from the Governor's Office of Relief and Recovery helped to cover lost event revenue.

With fiscal uncertainties on the horizon, USVLT's 2021 projections reflect a more conservative outlook. Yet with a strong launch of the 20 Years & Onward campaign and some of USVLT's most ambitious land projects well underway, a return to normalcy later this year is attainable.

For the Land Trust to keep fulfilling its mission, the backing of our local community is essential. The organization's continuing ability to preserve land for community benefit is only made possible with your support. Thank you!



\*The financials reported here include income and expenses relating both to our operating budget, as well as campaigns run for special projects. While membership support accounts for 4% of total income in 2020, it accounts for an impressive 42% of "operating income" that is not tied to a specific land project. Thank you.

## BUSINESS PARTNERS

A special THANK YOU to these business partners! Please support them, because when you do, they're supporting us!

### CONTRIBUTE TO PLACE & SACO RIVER LEVEL



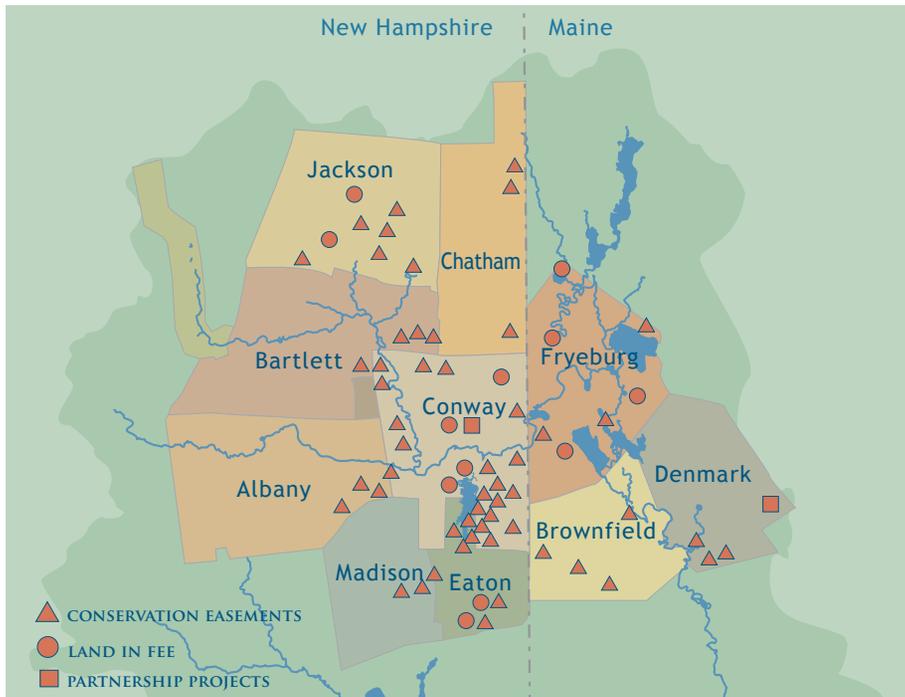
#### SWIFT RIVER LEVEL

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White Mountain Oil & Propane  
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#### ELLIS RIVER LEVEL

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The Local Grocer  
Thompson House Eatery  
Vintage Frameworks  
White Birch Books



At the close of 2020, the Upper Saco Valley Land Trust and our partners had completed 75 conservation projects, totaling over 12,000 acres throughout our 11-town service area. Please see [www.usvlt.org](http://www.usvlt.org) for more detailed location information about these easements and preserves.

# DONORS & SUPPORTERS

(Donations received 11/1/19 – 12/31/20)

Landowner contributor = L  
Easement monitor = M  
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**USVLT sincerely thanks all of its 2020 contributors.  
We couldn't do it without you!**

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*Pine Hill/ Mike Dana*

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Jay Rancourt, Dead Tree (detail)

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**20 YEARS & ONWARD  
CAPITAL CAMPAIGN**

(10/1/2019 – 12/31/2020)

*The largest undertaking in our organization's history, this capital campaign will support the creation of the Dundee Community Forest in Jackson and Bartlett, the expansion of the Pine Hill Community Forest in Conway, the creation of a capital reserve fund, and an agricultural fund for future farm easements and advocacy. The campaign will continue through 2021.*

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