

## Community Conservation

By William Abbott

**B**elow our logo, you may have noticed the words “Preserving Land for Community Benefit.” In 2014, the Board unanimously chose to adopt this phrase as the Land Trust’s official motto, on par with our (admittedly much more lengthy) mission statement. We are proud of our motto, as it perfectly and succinctly defines what we do.

There is a movement afoot in land conservation circles to move toward community-focused conservation, and we are also proud to be a part of that movement. But what, exactly, do we mean by community conservation? Land trusts, across the nation, have been astonishingly successful. There are now more than 1700 land trusts in the US; together, we have preserved 47,000,000

acres. This is a remarkable accomplishment – but arguably a simplistic answer to the daunting challenges that face us.

Has conservation success impacted the people in the communities land trusts serve? Are people healthier? Are young people connected to nature in a more authentic way? Are the politics surrounding land conservation less divisive? As our country becomes more diverse, is the land trust movement reflecting such diversity? For many land trusts, the answer to these questions is a resounding “no.”

The Upper Saco Valley Land Trust has done tremendous work since its first acquisition in 2001. In the years since, we’ve acquired interests in 49 properties that together protect over 7,800 acres of land. 13 miles of river frontage. Pre-

vious water resources, from groundwater protection to ephemeral vernal pools. As far as traditional land protection goes, we’ve excelled.

Doug Burnell, in his President’s Message, details some of the work we’ve undertaken to also excel at “community conservation.” There’s a basic truth underlying the concept of community conservation: asking the communities we serve what they need, and then listening – really listening – to the answers. So please, as members and supporters of the Land Trust, let us know what you think.

What does the future hold? Certainly a lot more land protection. But also continued collaboration with our stakeholders, and listening hard to the communities we serve. It’s a bright future.

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*Preserving Land for  
Community Benefit*

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# M President's Message

from Doug Burnell



The “community benefit” theme in this newsletter deserves some specific explanation of our efforts here at the Land Trust. I should immediately clarify that we consider plants and animals, as well as humans, to be communities worthy of benefit from our conservation efforts. But for now, let’s look at our work aimed at helping out people.

At our 2013 Multi-Town Meeting, a strong theme emerged around protecting trailheads. This concept is especially pronounced in National Forest areas where federal lands were intentionally acquired up on the mountainsides, in order to leave the valley floors in the private sector.

The Land Trust’s trail efforts have begun on three of the parcels we own in fee. Our construction of a pathway past the intriguing early-1800’s cellarhole of the Wentworth Hill cabin and on to the cascades in Weeks Brook, on the Monroe Lucas Preserve in East Conway, for example, is nearly complete. Several of our conservation easements are aimed at protecting existing trail systems, and some provide for new or additional trail development. In this case, our pending addition of the Mount Surprise easement to the adjacent Osgood and Burnell ones is expected to help us protect, organize, and access a local trail system already linking them together.

I must insert a reminder that not all our easements encourage public access; some land holdings – private homesteads, farmed areas, and delicate wild communities, to name a few – benefit from little human incursion. Our mandate going forward, though, is to help towns, especially, in protecting access to beloved natural areas and special places.

As the larger conservation community moves toward promoting public health through quality opportunities for recreation, local food, nature interaction, and even affordable housing, the Land Trust is collaborating with many local efforts to these ends. One example is our help launching (and remaining the fiscal agent for) the North Conway Farmers’ Market. Another is our Easement Exploration Series, which is aimed at getting our members (and other folks) onto the land they have helped preserve.

Although the work that we do already benefits both natural and human communities in myriad ways, we have a lot more community-building work ahead, and we hope you’ll join us on that journey.

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# In Recognition

It was with sincere regret that the Land Trust board recently accepted the resignation of our long-time secretary and board member Cynthia Briggs. An outspoken advocate for fairness and transparency, Cindy was our consistent voice of reason in many deliberations throughout her ten years on the board of directors. A veteran member of the USVLT Development Committee, Cindy was also instrumental in overseeing newsletter production, organizing events, and doing much other “heavy lifting” over the years.

Cindy consistently drew from her lifetime of service as a town of Conway selectman (the first woman so-elected), on its planning and zoning boards, and on the boards of the NH Municipal Association and the Pequawket Foundation, all of which earned her laurels as a Valley Treasure in 2007. Along with her likewise community-serving husband Connie, she was also an innkeeper and restaurateur.

Filling the hole left by Cindy’s resignation is another tried-and-true board member, Dexter Harding.



From all of us continuing on in your footsteps, Cindy, we thank you for your inspirational service and wish you well.

# Making a Difference

Volunteers are the lifeblood of community – the community of the Upper Saco Valley Land Trust included. We are fortunate to count on many, many volunteers that assist with everything from balancing the books to long-range planning.

Our volunteers are our easement monitors, our Board members, our event planners, our committee members. They help stuff envelopes; they put together budgets; they research title. We are indebted to them for helping to get good work done, and also because they help build community. There is perhaps no better example of this than Art Celebrates Place – our spring art show and gathering. Every year, our three volunteer organizers (Marnie Cobbs, Linda Gray and Lucy Gatchell) are joined by Board members, committee members, and other “recruits” to produce an evening that creates a sense of belonging – belonging to a particular place, a larger landscape, and yes, belonging to a community.

The Land Trust has immediate needs for volunteers in these five areas: 1) future planning and stewardship of our preserves, from building trails to creating species lists; 2) development of new land projects identified in our Natural Resource Inventory process, 3) financial planning, 4) events and outreach, and 5) publications and newsletters. Let us know if you or someone you know has these skills and is interested! Together, we are all preserving land for community benefit.



Volunteer monitor Lisa Holcomb at work!

# Current Land Protection Projects

## Mt. Surprise Bartlett, NH

Kearsarge's Mount Surprise is beloved by the public for many types of outdoor enjoyment, including recreational trails that lead to the historic vista and beyond. The Upper Saco Valley Land Trust is in final negotiations to purchase the development rights on the property, ensuring that this land remain open space, forever. We met our fundraising goal in fewer than 6 months, thanks to an outpouring of community and neighborhood support – thank you!

Sited below the Merriman State Forest and the White Mountain National Forest, and adjacent to two other easements held by USVLT (on the Burnell and the Osgood woodlots), this property is now part of a “habitat block” of conservation land, and serves as a gateway for thousands of acres of public lands. Once the easement on Mount Surprise is acquired, the public will be able to enjoy access to this property – and the two abutting easements – without fear of future “no trespassing” signs.

The easement also allows for sustainable forestry to be part of this property's future — enabling the once-cherished views across the Valley to be re-established from the summit of Mount Surprise and then maintained.

For more information, including maps and the story of how the “Mount” got its name, please see our website at <http://www.usvlt.org/mt-surprise/>.



## Weston's Rivercroft Farm Fryeburg, ME

On time and on budget! After completing the fundraising for the purchase of a conservation easement on Weston's Rivercroft Farm in 2013, the Land Trust signed the final conservation easement deed in January, 2014. A multi-year effort, this project is a significant step in securing a viable farming future in the Saco River watershed, and our first farmland protection project in Maine. Conserving this land was only possible through the generosity of the Weston family, USVLT's many members and supporters, as well as the Maine Farmland Trust and USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service's Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP).



# Let's Grow Green Hills, Conway, NH



We're currently partnering with The Nature Conservancy on a significant expansion of the Green Hills Preserve, adding 1,300 acres onto the existing 4,250-acre preserve. This

project connects many different properties already conserved and enhances the largest intact block of conservation land in the Mount Washington Valley. The total campaign goal for this acquisition

was \$1.4M, much of which was sourced through government grants. The Land Trust's members contributed \$50,000 to the total campaign goal – demonstrating the importance of this project to Conway and the greater Mount Washington Valley. Thank you!

The purchase of these lands protects these habitats:

- high-quality wetlands, including 7 miles of headwater streams, which are home to fish species of conservation concern, including the Eastern brook trout
- habitat for 73 species of breeding and migratory birds
- a large wintering yard for white-tailed deer

The protection of the property will also provide continued recreational access for activities including hiking, mountain biking, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing and nature study. For more information and maps of the property, please see <http://www.usvlt.org/grow-green-hills/>

## Landowner Perspective

Between 1887 and 1895, Mount Surprise and 40 acres of surrounding land were purchased by John Worcester in five separate tracts. The current owners of Mount Surprise, who are Jean Louise Briggs, William W. Briggs, Meg Worcester, and Horace W. Briggs, are all descended from John Worcester. This is their Landowner Perspective:

*“It was John Worcester in the latter decades of the 19th century who appreciated the special beauty of the woods, ledges and views of what would soon be called Mt. Surprise. Two succeeding generations of Worcesters, including John's daughter, Margaret Cary Worcester, and the mother of the present owners, Margaret Worcester Briggs, took pains to preserve this beauty and make it more accessible to neighbors, the public, and the many hotel tourists, with trails, a carriage road, and the regular cutting of the magnificent 200-degree view. We are delighted that the USVLT will continue these efforts at conservation, improvement, and public accessibility.”*

The Land Trust thanks the Worcester – Briggs Family, and their vision of a vibrant future.

*Funding for our Mount Surprise Project was provided by an Anonymous Foundation, Buckingham Mountain Foundation, Connie Davis Watson Foundation, Evenor Arming-ton Fund, Fields Pond Foundation, Gibson / Woodbury Foundation, Kendal C. and Anna Ham Charitable Foundation, many members of the New England Mountain Bike Association (NEMBA) - White Mountains Chapter, many gifts in memory of Charles and Patricia Osgood, and many more private individuals. A full list of project supporters will be available in our next Annual Report.*

*Funding for the Let's Grow Green Hills initiative was provided by many, many private individuals and charitable foundations. A full list of project supporters will be available in our next Annual Report.*

*Funding for our Weston's Rivercroft Farm project was detailed in our 2013 Annual Report, available on our website at [www.usvlt.org](http://www.usvlt.org)*

# The Work Continues Once We Own the Property

By Tom Henderson

Forever is a concept called “in perpetuity” in conservation circles, a term often used when we speak about preserving land for community benefit. This perpetual commitment is what makes land trusts unique in the private sector. When the Land Trust takes ownership of a conservation property, primarily through donation, it becomes ours to care for and to “steward.” Stewarding the land going forward is equally as important as preserving it in perpetuity in the first place.

While we have protected 49 properties totaling 7,800 acres, the Land Trust currently owns and manages 8 properties, totaling 535 acres. We make land-stewardship decisions based upon several factors, such as the intent of the donor, traditional uses for the land, and the findings of a full ecological assessment that tells us what conservation values are present and which uses would not be detrimental to such conservation values. This thoughtful process begins at acquisition and

continues “in perpetuity.”

The 65-acre Leita Monroe Lucas Preserve is one example. Located in the northeast corner of Conway, it is part of a larger block of preserved land including the Green Hills Preserve, Conway Common Lands and the White Mountain National Forest, each contributing to wildlife habitat protection and recreational access. As such, it was natural for the Land Trust to evaluate how its preserve could enhance those amenities. The Land Trust has hired a professional wildlife biologist to develop a Wildlife Habitat Management Plan, and we are developing in-house stewardship plans which call for enhancing the recreational opportunities through trail construction.

As the Land Trust forges ahead with new and exciting projects, we are forever mindful both of our duty and responsibility for the land we own and of our commitment to maximize the community benefit that these special places afford.



6 A western branch of the Weeks Brook as it flows through the Leita Monroe Lucas Preserve

## OUR SUPPORTERS

Our supporters include YOU and the following businesses and foundations. Together we ensure our region remains a beautiful place to call home or visit.



Many of our business partners participate in *Contribute to Place™* (a program of the Maine Land Trust Network) where their patrons



can make a small contribution that supports conservation. Each donation may be small, but together they have a huge impact. To learn more, please call us at 603-356-9683.

*We are extremely grateful to the following for their support:* Alkalay & Smillie, Anonymous Foundations (2), Cooper Cargill Chant, Evenor Armington Fund, HEB Engineers, Pequawket Foundation, Robert & Dorothy Goldberg Charitable Foundation, USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service

*Funding for our Community Impact Grant was generously provided by these donor-advised funds of the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation:* The Anna B. Stearns Fund, John F. & Dorothy H. McCabe Environmental Fund, an Anonymous Fund, and the Stanton & Elisabeth Davis Fund.

## WAYS YOU CAN HELP



YES! I want to help the Upper Saco Valley Trust preserve land for community benefit.

### BECOME A MEMBER!

Please accept my membership contribution:

- \$2,500     \$500     \$125     \$35  
 \$1,000     \$250     \$75     Other

*USVLT is a 501 (c) (3) tax exempt organization and contributions are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.*

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

### GIVE A GIFT MEMBERSHIP!

YES! I want to introduce a friend or family member to the great work of USVLT.

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 (Please put recipient's name and mailing address above.)

### DONATE ONLINE!

www.usvlt.org **PayPal**

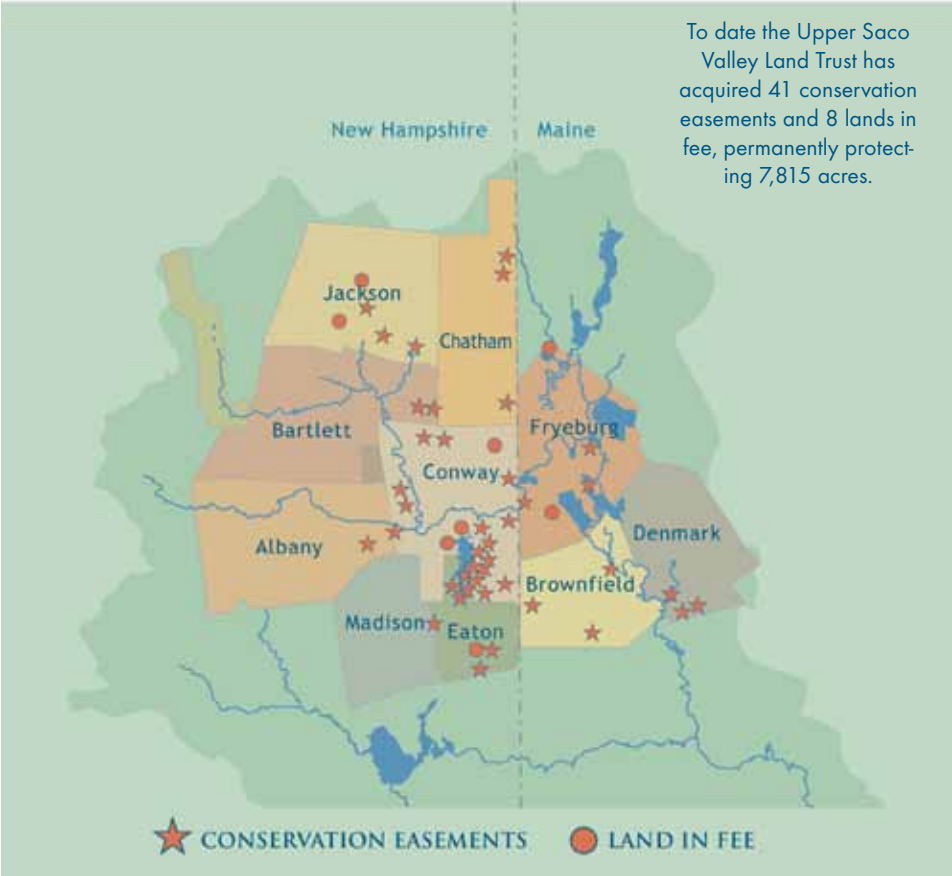
### MAKE PLANS!

Have you considered including USVLT in your estate plans, or are you interested in donating securities? Please call (603) 356-9683 or email info@usvlt.org for more information.

### VOLUNTEER!

It's boots on the ground that make land preservation happen. To become a volunteer monitor or help with public events, please call (603) 356-9683 or email info@usvlt.org.

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To date the Upper Saco Valley Land Trust has acquired 41 conservation easements and 8 lands in fee, permanently protecting 7,815 acres.

# NOTICE!

## We're Getting Accredited

We are embarking on a long – and extremely worthwhile! – journey: we are seeking accreditation. In late 2015, the Upper Saco Valley Land Trust plans to join the ranks of 254 other land trusts who are accredited. These land trusts have proven themselves to be worthwhile investments, and they acknowledge and have planned for the challenges and opportunities in long-term protection of land in the public interest.

In early 2015, a public comment period will open for our application. The Commission invites public input and accepts signed, written comments on pending applications.

To learn more about the accreditation program and to submit a comment, visit [www.landtrustaccreditation.org](http://www.landtrustaccreditation.org), or email your comment to [info@landtrust-accreditation.org](mailto:info@landtrust-accreditation.org).

*"The idea of wilderness needs no defense. It only needs more defenders."* EDWARD ABBEY

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