

## Then and Now USVLT Turns 20

Peter Benson Interviewed by Meghan Moody

Upper Saco Valley Land Trust achieved its 20th anniversary on September 15th, 2020, a remarkable milestone. Over the past two decades, the organization has conserved more than 12,000 acres. No one, including USVLT's founders, could have predicted how those conservation victories have added up, nor the upheaval 2020 has delivered. Especially with this year's increased demand for trails and open space, for recreational and spiritual purposes alike, USVLT's achievements seem more important than ever. To honor the occasion, we asked new Board member Meghan Moody to interview Land Trust founding member

(and recently rejoined Board member) Peter Benson.

"When you are in the start of something, you don't know what the future holds," Peter said. "We were very intentional in developing the Land Trust, but I don't think anyone could have guessed where this was going to go." Peter used the organization's first project, the Harding Easement in Jackson, as an example of how the group had a much more organic and home-grown approach to conservation. "We just went there, it was 12 acres, saw that it was beautiful and had a ski trail on it, and said, 'Sure, why not?'" Peter continued, "It was high-profile, right on

the side of the road, and everyone knew where it was. It was fantastic. There was no way that a larger organization was going to take on a project of its size at the time. Everything really took off from there."

USVLT has continued to fill this local void within the conservation community ever since. Some projects that Peter helped start in the 90's have only been finalized since he returned to the Board. Peter smiled and said, "The seeds that you plant sometimes can take a while to germinate, but they do come up." He added that there has been a shift over the past two decades, as some land owners have become much

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Photo: Mike Dana



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# USVLT President's Message



*Doug Burnell*

In spite of far-reaching and long-lasting disruptions and delays caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the Upper Saco Valley Land Trust is still turning 20 years old this fall, and we are busier than ever with great conservation projects, promising significant public benefit.

The coronavirus struck while we were adjusting to our wonderful new office location in the old firehouse in downtown Conway Village, transitioning in new Outreach & Office Manager Aimee St. Germain, working toward reaccreditation with the Land Trust Alliance, and shepherding along nine new land-conservation projects. We adapted nimbly and by March 20th had transitioned to an entirely remote workforce (with the help of Zoom and Google). Our work has continued apace since then, and we have gradually re-opened the office during the summer

months (outside visitors are welcome, by appointment).

Uncertainty is the new “rule of thumb,” from stock market swerves and job losses to tentative school reopening (and re-closing) plans. USVLT has not been immune: the unfortunate cancelations of Art Celebrates Place and Fields on the Saco gatherings have resulted in anticipated revenue losses of more than \$50,000. Monetary support from caring long-time funders as well as government programs – namely, the federal Payroll Protection Program and New Hampshire’s Nonprofit Emergency Relief Fund – have helped us bridge this dramatic gap. We have also changed work priorities to meet our communities’ needs. Prompted by unprecedented demand on our region’s high-quality outdoor-recreation opportunities, we have been promoting the enjoyment of USVLT’s existing preserves and accessible easements, and are working on more trail networks and access points.

Learning new perspectives from the Black Lives Matter movement and how we can better support our work with the pillars of justice, equity, diversity and inclusion are ongoing initiatives. And with hope that our collective virus-fighting efforts may continue toward success, we value your unwavering support, and look forward to your helping us properly celebrate another landmark: the Land Trust turning 21, next year!



USVLT’s Board met in-person (and masked) for the first time in six months in late summer. Pictured L to R: Rebecca McReynolds, Alex Drummond, Dan Stepanauskas, Anne Pillion, Peter Benson, Sue Nichols, Ann Bennett, Rick Jenkinson, Meghan Moody, Mark Dindorf, Doug Burnell (Not pictured: Lindsay Kafka)

# Justice, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion

The year 2020 has been intense and memorable. In June, after months of locked-down pandemic living, the country was confronted with the brutal murder of George Floyd. Mr. Floyd's death – one among so many – has been a tipping point, sparking widespread protests, and prompting soul-searching by those in positions of power on every level: individual, community, and national.

The outdoor conservation and recreation world, including USVLT, is not immune. As board member Lindsay Kafka wrote in a June statement, which was endorsed by the Board and shared with members, “the work that we do very much intersects with issues of racial justice, although it might not seem so at first blush.” The intersections are multiple: the outdoor conservation movement in which our work is grounded has a legacy of racist practices (Jim Crow laws kept the national parks segregated when they first opened) and attitudes (the legendary John Muir is known to have held racist views); European settlers wrested the very land we now work to conserve and protect from the local Abenaki native population and imposed a foreign system of private land ownership upon it; outdoor spaces are not equally accessible or welcoming to all; and adverse environmental practices have a disparate impact on Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) communities.

In this moment of reckoning, how is USVLT responding, beyond the statement shared in June? Since then, a committee of Board members, staff, and volunteers has convened to tackle the project of integrating principles of Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) into our work. The committee's initial mandate is to partner with peer organizations also engaged in this work to share best practices, resources and lessons. Toward this end, we have joined

monthly Zoom calls facilitated by the Maine Environmental Education Association and Change makers, a forum for organizations like ours to do precisely those things. Participants range from land trusts from around New England, to environmental education groups and consultancies, to larger non-profits such as the Appalachian Mountain Club and The Nature Conservancy. The ongoing conversation is rich and exciting.

In conjunction with the Land Trust's Executive Committee, a near-term priority is the crafting of a values statement for USVLT. We have aspired to develop such a statement for some time, but the formation of the JEDI committee has been a catalyst to make this project a priority.

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The committee has also created a page on the USVLT website for JEDI learning resources. This dynamic page is updated regularly, and includes resources that are specific to the intersection of JEDI principles and conservation, as well as resources for individual learning on the broader issues of ally-ship, anti-racism, and privilege.

The Land Trust's JEDI endeavor will suggest other necessary, concrete steps as we learn more and lean into this work. We pledge to keep you updated along the way.

## USVLT Turns 20

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more involved with both the crafting and management of their easements in partnership with the Land Trust.

For Peter, the future holds more opportunities than ever before. The evolution of land trust movements in general has shifted, not only in strategy, but also in focus. “Two decades ago, our focus was solely forestry and responsible ecology. That was very cutting-edge and innovative at the time. More recently, we have worked on farm easements, establishing community forests, and improving public access. The lesson here is that the land-conservation community needed to continue to adapt and be responsive to the needs of our community at large. Some of the things that I would like to see the Land Trust tackle in the future relate to affordable housing solutions – we need to be creating sustainable communities where people can afford to live and also enjoy the great outdoors.”

“I don't think you could say this everywhere, but here, it is the essence of where we live,” Peter reflected. “In that sense, we are spoiled because we are surrounded by more than a million acres of conservation land in an atmosphere where it's accessible,” he continued. “I think that sometimes we wake up in the morning and take for granted that we have this amazing legacy of land conservation, whether it be by federal and state governments or by conservations groups, big and small. It is ingrained in our psyche. I don't know how we as a community would function without it.”

# Conservation Project Updates

## Old Blake Farm— Brownfield, ME

The Old Blake Farm in Brownfield, Maine is an historic 95-acre farm that was conserved by USVLT in July 2020. The farm has been jointly owned by four separate families for nearly 50 years. Over the decades, the woodlands onsite have been managed sustainably; now, the new conservation easement held by USVLT allows for continued well-managed forestry. The easement also supports continued agricultural use of the land and maintenance of fields, affording expansive views from Old County Road to the White Mountains in the west. The donor families' generosity ensures that this corner of Brownfield will remain bucolic for generations to come.

## Lucy Brook Farm— Conway, NH

USVLT purchased a conservation easement on the Lucy Brook Farm in October 2020. Near the foot of Cathedral Ledge, this conservation easement includes frontage along Lucy Brook and the Saco River. The farm also boasts a high-yield aquifer, important agricultural soils, and connectivity to other conserved lands. This area was settled by the John Lucy family in the early 1800's, and many descendants (including the Gaudettes) still occupy and farm the land. This conservation easement will allow the farm to remain intact for future generations. We thank the Gaudette family for their vision, passion, and stewardship of the land.

## World Fellowship Center— Albany, NH

In June 2020, the World Fellowship Center granted three separate conserva-



Fields at Old Blake Farm by Meghan Moody



Pictured L to R: Abby King, USVLT Conservation Lands Manager; Andrea Walsh, WFC Co-Director; and Doug Burnell, USVLT President

tion easements to USVLT in order to permanently protect nearly 400 acres of its campus. A socially-distanced closing took place on June 3rd outside the offices of Cooper Cargill Chant in North Conway. The easements permanently protect a diversity of natural resources, including shorefront on Whitton Pond, Chocorua River frontage, wetlands, and nesting sites for the Common Loon. The World Fellowship Center has been an exemplary steward of these lands for the past 77 years. If these properties should ever change hands, the easements held by USVLT will ensure that their natural resources are preserved forever.

Funding for the World Fellowship Center project and the Lucy Brook Farm Easement was provided by:  
The NH Land and Community Heritage Investment Program (LCHIP)  
The NH State Conservation Commission "Moose Plate" Grant  
The NH Aquatic Resource Mitigation Program  
The New Hampshire Drinking Water and Groundwater Trust Fund  
The Davis Conservation Foundation  
The William P. Wharton Trust  
Donor Advised Funds of the NH Charitable Foundation  
USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)  
The Town of Conway  
The World Fellowship Center Board of Trustees  
The Gaudette Family

And many, many generous community members.

## Hill Family Lands— Eaton, NH

The Hill family gifted 221 acres of pristine forest land to USVLT in August 2020. The property, located on Paul Hill Road in Eaton, abuts other conservation properties owned by the Land Trust and the Town of Eaton. We are delighted that this conservation project, highlighted in last year's fall newsletter, has now crossed the finish line! A sincere thank you to the Hill family for ensuring the permanent preservation of these lands.

# Looking Ahead to 2021



Photo: Mike Dana

## Pine Hill Community Forest Expansion

Much has been accomplished in 20 years, but some of the Land Trust's most significant projects lie ahead, including the Dundee Community Forest initiative and the Pine Hill Community Forest Expansion.

USVLT is working to purchase 134 acres to add to the existing 460-acre Pine Hill Community Forest in Conway. This project will improve access and trail networks and expand the Forest's size by 30%.

The potential acquisition is forested and undeveloped, and it fills in a missing "puzzle piece" of land on the existing Community Forest. It will enhance habitat for plant and animal species, while widening opportunities for outdoor education and recreation.

Situated in the heart of the Valley, expansion of the Forest has great significance for a region under high development pressure. The Pine Hill Community Forest is already managed to balance ecological and recreational values by a multi-stakeholder group.

Complex projects in daunting times depend on the abiding support of USVLT members, as well as other

funding sources. Applications have been submitted to the NH Land and Community Heritage Investment program (LCHIP), the "Moose Plate" program, and several private foundations. In addition, an application will be submitted to the Forest Service's Community Forest Program in early 2021. If those grants are successful, the project will be completed in late 2021.

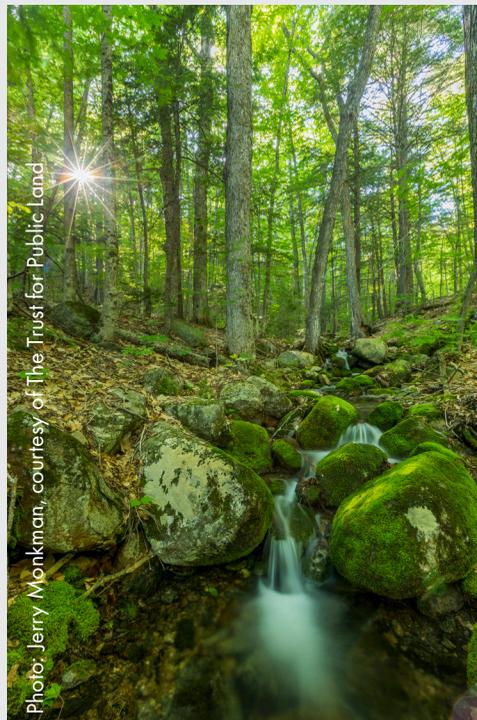


Photo: Jerry Monkman, courtesy of The Trust for Public Land

## Dundee Community Forest

USVLT has partnered with The Trust for Public Land to conserve one of the largest unprotected properties in our 11-town service area, the 1,172-acre Dundee Community Forest project in Bartlett and Jackson. The land, which will be managed for sustainable forestry, recreation, and the protection of rare natural communities, also serves as a buffer for the headwaters of Wildcat Brook, a federally designated Wild and Scenic River.

Consisting of 16 parcels, the Forest has been assembled and stewarded by a local family over the last 60 years. USVLT intends to manage this remarkable land in partnership with stakeholders in the towns of Bartlett and Jackson. The property will be further protected by a Conservation Easement held by the NH Division of Forests and Lands. The Dundee Community Forest will be open for public access, while also maintained as a working forest, continuing to supply logs to local mills and forest products sector jobs, with revenues for the towns from timber yield tax.

This project is among USVLT's most ambitious, both in terms of acreage, as well as dollars needed to conserve the land and achieve management goals. This summer, the project ranked twelfth nationwide for funding from the Forest Legacy Program, grounds for optimism that the full request for \$2.3M in federal money will be awarded in early 2021. These dollars will also need to be matched by other state and local funding sources, as well as gifts from our generous community of supporters.

## Joining the Board



Upper Saco Valley Land Trust welcomed three new board members in 2020: Meghan Moody, Sue Nichols, and Lindsay Kafka. Together, they represent a diversity of backgrounds and talent, from native grown to a longtime seasonal resident who is now making Mount Washington Valley her home. At the same time, USVLT would like to express sincere gratitude to five members who departed the board in 2020, including Greg Cooper, Deborah Fauver, and USVLT veterans Burgess Smith, Jim Hastings, and Tom Gross. A heartfelt thank you from all of us. Here is a look at our new members:

**Meghan Moody** is a proud native of Mount Washington Valley, who studied marketing, management, and art at Elmira College. She now utilizes those skills as the Marketing Coordinator at HEB Engineers in North Conway. Meghan is a multi-tasker, social media maven, artist, and a wicked good hockey player. In addition to her keen sense of design, she has valuable service sector experience working for local restaurants, including Thompson House Eatery and The Oxford House Inn. Meghan and her partner, Dave, live in North Conway with their two pups, and enjoy all things outdoors.

**Sue Nichols** grew up on her family's dairy farm in Center Conway, where she now lives. For the past three decades, she held numerous executive positions in non-profit health-related and environmental organizations in Georgia and Florida. For over 20 years, Sue co-instructed a field course on the natural history of sub-Saharan Africa, alongside her husband, Jim Gore, a retired university dean and aquatic entomologist. A past member of the Conway Conservation Commission, and long-term volunteer for social service organizations, Sue has been a member of USVLT since 2009, and a member of USVLT's Development Committee since 2017.

**Lindsay Kafka** has a deep affinity for the landscape of the greater Mount Washington Valley, having been first introduced to it as a child. Her professional career has been focused primarily around the greater Boston area. Initially a founding partner for the Concord Law Group, she later took positions with both Boston College and Harvard University in their philanthropy departments, focusing on planned giving. She has also worked on fundraising campaigns and nonprofit governance as an independent consultant. Most recently, Lindsay completed her nursing degree, and she and her husband Steve will soon become full-time residents of South Conway.

## Committee “Shout Out”

Committee and volunteer work, though it takes place in the background, keeps our projects moving forward. The Land Committee, chaired by Mark Dindorf, and Development Committee, chaired by Ann Bennett, meet monthly, while myriad other working groups convene as needed. These committees include Strategic Action (SACo), Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI), Finance, Art Celebrates Place, Fields on the Saco, special events and others. In the meantime, there are more than 40 easement monitors who keep a careful eye on conserved land.

USVLT sincerely thanks all of the volunteers who are not currently on the Board of Directors, including Ailie Byers, Marnie Cobbs, Linda Comeau, Penny Deans, Tom Deans, Jim Doucette, Lucy Gatchell, Linda Gray, Jim Hastings, Lindsay Johnston, Jeff Lathrop, Julie Levine, Tricia Mattox-Larson, Amanda Peterson, Susan Ross-Parent, Tim Scott, Jeff Sires, Sasha Tracy, David Wood, and James Wrigley. Your time is our greatest gift.



# Landowner Perspectives



Molly Mundy

*“My parents put that land together when I was a little kid and it’s been a special place for me ever since. If I have a home, that’s it. I’ve lost count of the hours, days, weeks, months, I have spent working and just enjoying those woods.*

*It’s a very special place.”*

*—Jim Hill*

*“And so we have given away Paul Hill Road. Better said, we have given back Paul Hill Road. It has always stayed put, but legally it is now where it belongs, entrusted to a community of forest stewards who have offered to shoulder its safekeeping so that it can serve the community that it lies within and who know best how to draw from and contribute to it.”*

*—George Hill and Sarah Hill*

*From the time we purchased our property 50 years ago, we intended to preserve and conserve the land for wildlife habitat, ecologically sound forest management, and as a retreat and creative gathering place for family and friends.*

*We now believe those long-term goals can best be realized by joining others in the Upper Saco Valley Land Trust.*

*As Mary Oliver says in a verse from her poem  
Wild Geese:*

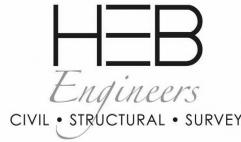
*“Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,  
are heading home again.*

*Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,  
the world offers itself to your imagination,  
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting—  
over and over announcing your place  
in the family of things”*

*—Wyatt Wade, on behalf of the owners of Old  
Blake Farm*

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