



Western Foothills Land Trust

Fall Newsletter 2024



Conserving Their Land
How two families have planned for their land's future.

Trails Committee Update
An invaluable resource for WFLT's recreational trail management.

A United Organization
The Trust further explores the feasibility of a merger.

A Note from WFLT's Executive Director & Board President



Photo: Cait Bourgault

EXPLORING A NEW PATH FORWARD

As we write this note, the air has turned decidedly crisp, the first blush of color is gracing the maple trees, and we are turning our attention to all things fall and winter. While some land trusts have their “high season” during summer, Western Foothills Land Trust is truly “on” all year long — from the Norway Triathlon in July to skiing at Roberts Farm in the winter.

Like most years, 2024 has been very busy. The pages of this newsletter are full of the many accomplishments and activities the Land Trust has been involved in this past year. But there’s so much more that isn’t included in these pages. We invite you to connect with us on social media to keep up with our conservation work, programs, successes, informational notices, and ski conditions.

One area we’d like to highlight for our community is our work towards a merger with Mahoosuc Land Trust (MLT) and Loon Echo Land Trust (LELT), with the goal of becoming a single, regional conservation organization. Over the past three decades, our three organizations have worked side by side in both ad-hoc collaborations and formal partnerships. LELT, MLT, and WFLT view a merger as a way to elevate our professionalism and maximize our impact on conservation and outdoor recreation throughout the region.

As a single organization, we will be able to provide our staff with opportunities for professional development and the chance to pursue their career paths with well-matched compensation and benefits. We look forward to streamlining the many redundant functions our orga-

nizations currently maintain — such as finance, communications, legal work, human resources, and national accreditation and certifications — while opening up opportunities to engage in new areas, including a greater role in conservation advocacy.

We are deeply committed to maintaining WFLT’s unique local ties and community connections, while effectively positioning ourselves to respond to emerging regional conservation issues. Together, we envision a future of healthy landscapes, thriving communities, and abundant access to the outdoors. We believe that a formal merger is the optimal way to accomplish this.

Currently, independent expert advisors are working with each organization to assess the practical feasibility of a merger. We are delving into financial modeling, program structures, staff roles, endowments, and land and asset holdings. While there are still many unknowns, we look forward to sharing more information as we work together to create a shared future for the benefit of the people and the lands of our region. We would love to hear from you about this potential merger.

If you have questions, comments, or ideas to share, please reach out to Kacy Bailey at kacy@wflmaine.org.

Wishing you all a safe and delightful fall in our woods and on our trails!

Kacy Bailey, Executive Director

Carl Costanzi, Board President





Photo courtesy of Bella Childs-Michael

Conservation Intern: Bella Childs-Michael

This summer we had the pleasure to work with conservation intern, Bella Childs Michael. Through the Trust's involvement with the Maine Coast Heritage Trust's Richard G. Rockefeller Conservation Internship Program, we've been fortunate to have three great interns over the past three years. The Rockefeller program is a cost-sharing program between Maine Coast Heritage Trust and local land trusts to allow land trusts to hire engaged interns, and to increase the number of students with experience in conservation fields. None of it would have been possible, however, without the generosity of Norway resident and longtime WFLT volunteer, Joan Beal, who has opened her home to these interns for their summer stay as a donation to the land trust.

Here is what Bella had to say about her experience with WFLT this past summer:

"I've had the privilege to work for this incredible land trust for nine weeks. My chief project as the stewardship intern was monitoring the boundaries of our fee-owned properties (property the land trust owns outright). With guidance from Alyssa Andrews, Stewardship Director, I monitored 28 fee-owned properties, making up over 4,500 acres of land and spread across 9 different towns.

While not monitoring properties, Development Director, Lee Dassler, introduced me to the ongoing invasive species removal project at Shepard's Farm Preserve. I spent many mornings pulling and cutting Japanese barberry and black swallow wort from the fields.

I had the pleasure of working with WFLT's Community Engagement Director, Kelli Shedd, supporting community events, posting to social media, and meeting folks from other local organizations. Land trust work often involves plenty of solo labor but is truly a community effort!"

Trails Committee Reinvigorated

Under the leadership of WFLT Vice President, Conner Tremblay, and Stewardship Director, Alyssa Andrews, the Trails Committee has been reinvigorated with a new monthly meeting structure, a prioritized list of trail improvement projects, and regular trail work events. While constructing a new recreational trail is a significant achievement, it marks only the beginning of the ongoing work required to maintain our trail systems.

This committee has relieved some of the burden on staff by addressing immediate needs, such as clearing blowdowns, and by assisting with the planning of future trail systems. We also hope this engagement allows volunteers to develop new skills, while being supported and recognized for their invaluable contributions.



Photo: Lee Dassler

This past winter and spring offered ample opportunities for clearing blowdowns, and the committee is actively assessing other damage, such as increased erosion. Plans are underway to repair and adapt our trails to minimize erosion in the future. Additionally, bridge repair is scheduled for this fall, and we are conducting a comprehensive inventory of our trail assets to better plan for maintenance and future expansion. If you're interested in getting involved, please contact us at info@wfltmaine.org.

From Landowners to Stewards: Preserving Family Legacy Through Conservation



The Zilinsky's protected field.

All photos: Kelli Shedd

“He assured me that there were bobcats that lived up on the rocks on Canada Hill and a prominent point called the Pinnacle, west and to the north and they migrate back and forth between those two spots. So we decided that they and the other wildlife ought to have a corridor to the lake.” - Joe Zilinsky

Land trusts often practice conservation through the purchase of properties with desirable characteristics and qualities which support their mission. When WFLT owns a property, it retains control over its protection and management, ensuring the land is preserved in perpetuity, safeguarding its natural, cultural, and agricultural value from future development or exploitation. Owning the land allows the Trust to implement stewardship practices that benefit the environment, such as habitat restoration, erosion control, and sustainable land management. This also includes creating public trails or recreational spaces that can benefit the community.

While land ownership provides the Trust with full control over land protection, what about landowners who want to preserve their property but maintain ownership? Whether you have a family farm, a cherished woodlot, or land vital to protecting local watersheds, a conservation easement offers a powerful solution. This legal agreement allows you to preserve your land in perpetuity, ensuring it remains protected from development or exploitation, while still retaining the freedom of ownership. Every easement is unique, tailored to reflect your goals, whether it's limiting structures, preserving vegetation, or defining future land use.

Currently, the Trust stewards over 42 conservation easements, totaling just over 4,700 acres. For many landowners, the decision to place their property in an easement is deeply personal,

reflecting a desire to protect not only the natural beauty of the land but also their family's legacy. The following are two stories of families who have chosen to conserve their land through WFLT, each with unique motivations and a shared commitment to preserving their property for future generations.

Callie Zilinsky was born and raised in Oxford County. After a thirty-year hiatus in the Midwest, she and her husband, Joe, returned to Maine in 2000, moving back to the land and home in Otisfield that has been in her family since 1898. The main house is situated next to a modest barn (pictured on the cover), which once housed Callie's dairy cows during her youth and later became home to the couple's Belgian Draft and Percheron horses. When her father passed away, he left the land to his three children, with Callie inheriting the parcel that included the family home and barn. He had been forward-thinking, preparing for his children's futures by managing a sizable stand of timber for eventual harvest.

Around 2009, after nearly a decade of settling back into Maine, Joe found himself considering the purchase of a tractor and sought advice from a neighbor, retired Maine State Biologist and Game Warden, Mickey Noble. Noble, who regularly walked the woods around Otisfield, shared his knowledge of a thriving bobcat population on the Zilinskys' land, extending across the properties of Callie's siblings, and down to Thompson Lake. This area, known as the Pugleyville Corridor, became a focus for conservation. With the help of Lee Dassler, former director of WFLT, a grant was secured to assist with the due diligence requ-



Joe & Callie Zilinsky



(L-R) The locally famous chestnut tree, a chestnut burr, chestnut burrs and catkins litter the forest floor surrounding the tree.

ired to establish a group of conservation easements between Callie, Ann and David Watson, Ethyl and Craig Turner, and the Trust.

The Zilinskys' 50-acre easement allows for agricultural and silvicultural practices. "You'd have to use good practices—and if I wanted to clear a section from woods to pasture, I could, as long as I was going to use it agriculturally," explained Joe. They reserved about four acres around their home for unrestricted use. During their most recent timber harvest, they honored both the terms of their easement and Callie's father's legacy by working with a trusted forester and cutter. As Joe proudly remarked, "It resulted in an A-class cut."

Roger Crockett and Ann Siekman were already familiar with the Western Foothills Land Trust when they decided to place a conservation easement on their property in Hebron. The historic New England cape on the nearly 120-acre property was what first attracted them to the land when they purchased it in 2007. "This house reminded Roger of his grandparents' house, which was probably the initial draw, and I've always had an interest in old houses," explained Ann. The day they made an offer on the house, they learned that one family had owned the property from 1795 until just 20 years before their purchase, adding to the property's appeal.

The couple acquired six acres with the home, but they also purchased the surrounding acreage, reuniting the land that had historically been part of a single property.

Upon acquiring the land, they also discovered that a locally famous chestnut tree stood on the property. When Maine's Big Tree Project came to the state, there was excitement around the Crockett-Siekman chestnut tree, which was once the largest east of the Mississippi.

For Roger and Ann, protecting the land has always been about safeguarding the wildlife habitat and the local watershed. Three seasonal streams on their property ultimately flow into Marshall Pond, making this an ideal easement project for WFLT. Beyond the six-acre envelope around

their home, the easement prohibits any mechanized machinery from operating on the land beyond the brook or leading to it, ensuring the land remains undisturbed.

"In the spring, I love getting fiddleheads, making maple syrup, and gardening," Roger shared. "I feel like we take care of the land and make sure it's not ravaged, and it takes good care of us."



Ann Siekman & Roger Crockett

As these stories demonstrate, conservation easements offer landowners a meaningful way to protect not only the natural beauty of their properties but also the deep personal connections they have cultivated over the years. For the Zilinskys and the Crocketts, placing their land under easement is more than just conservation—it's about honoring family legacies, protecting wildlife habitats, and ensuring the land continues to thrive for future generations.

By working with Western Foothills Land Trust, these families have made sure their properties will remain protected, preserving their unique histories while benefiting the environment and the community. Their commitment is a testament to how conservation easements provide a balance between preservation and personal land stewardship—a gift to the land and to all who will enjoy it in the years to come.

The 2024 Norway Triathlon - A Sold Out Success!

The 2024 Norway Triathlon went off without a hitch on Saturday, July 13 at Lake Penneesseewassee Park, marking the 15th year the Norway Triathlon has been held, attracting participants and volunteers from Maine, New England, and beyond. While early morning thunder and rain showers threatened to end this event's amazing streak of great weather, the clouds departed shortly before 7 AM. The sun came out, and it was the most perfect weather we had had in years. This year's event was also the largest it has been since the pre-COVID era, boasting 132 individual and team racers.

Nearly 50 volunteers helped to prepare the course, post-race snacks, and water stations for the racers and to cheer on everyone at the event. Long-time participant Peter Glenshaw said, "This is the best triathlon, and we wouldn't miss it. What makes it so great is that it's at the height of summer, the course is so well-marked, and the volunteers for this event are absolutely the best. We can't wait to race again next year!"

Thank you to our generous sponsors for this event! The 2025 Norway Triathlon will be held on Saturday, July 12th. Registration will open in February 2025.



Maine Beer Company



All race photos by: Abigail Bennett

WFLT Board of Directors and Staff

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The Ullr & Skadi Club:

WFLT's Voluntary Winter Trail Pass Program for Roberts Farm

In the alpine skiing world, many invoke the names of Ullr and Skadi—Norse gods associated with snow and skiing—in hopes of a great snow year. We do the same! By joining the Ullr & Skadi Club, you can pay tribute to these “gods” and help ensure excellent snow conditions and trails at Roberts Farm.

While the Western Foothills Land Trust remains committed to keeping Roberts Farm accessible to all, with no fees for trail access or equipment rentals, we still face significant operational expenses to run the Nordic Center. Joining the Ullr

& Skadi Club is the best way to support Roberts Farm throughout the winter season.

Look for more details in our e-communications and our social media pages this November for how to join, and help us make this a fantastic winter for all!

All club members will receive recognition of their gift and an exclusive 2025 Ullr & Skadi Club sticker. Those joining at any individual level will also receive a set of WFLT Nordic Ski Straps, those joining the family level will receive two sets!



Ullr (ool-er) Is a Norse god associated with winter, skiing, and snow sports. Although the title of “god” may be disputed, his skill at hunting and skiing is not.



Skadi (skahd-ee) The Norse goddess of winter, often depicted on skis or snowshoes, said to rule over mountains. Like Ullr, she is also a skilled hunter.

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Photo by: Andy Gagne

