

Franklin Land Trust

Conserving Farms, Fields & Forests Since 1987

SPRING 2025

RESILIENT LANDSCAPES

*Enhancing Conservation Efforts
A Land Ethic
Forests For Fish*

**Event
Highlights**

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

To our FLT Family,

From the larger vision of resilient landscape conservation to amending a decades-old CR for clarity and increased security; from land use ethics to saving fish by restoring riparian habitats; from vernal pools to exploring our spring ephemerals, we hope that you will find something to pique your curiosity in this Spring edition of our newsletter.

We want you all to know that, regardless of changes occurring at the federal level, Franklin Land Trust's conservation work is continuing full speed ahead.

We are holding fast to our mission. Protecting our farmland to provide a local source of fresh food. Protecting the land around our rivers and streams to ensure we have clean drinking water for generations to come. Conserving our woodlands to secure a vital source of clean air. And protecting our natural areas to guarantee that we still have places to hike, boat, fish, see wildlife, or just enjoy the peace and quiet of nature.

We're all in this together! Conservation provides what every community - every person - needs to thrive. Our access to the land and its gifts is not a guarantee, it is a unique and precious resource that we must all do our part to protect.

We take pride in making all of our conservation areas, and nearly all of our events, accessible to the public free of charge. Community is a central theme in our communications with you, and it's not just an abstract. For us, land conservation means fostering community and extending the social contract to the land, to echo Will Sloan Anderson's insights on page 6.

We hope that this spring and summer you will come to our events, walk our conserved lands, and find togetherness with your neighbors and the natural world which sustains you.

With warmest regards,

Mary Lynn Sabourin



Mary Lynn Sabourin

Resilient Landscapes

BY SEBASTIAN LAMONTAGNE

PHOTO: ALAIN PTEROY

Jack and Danielle Lochhead are no strangers to conservation.

Most recently, they protected 65 acres along Reeds Bridge Road with a donated Conservation Restriction (CR) to the Franklin Land Trust (FLT). The CR was completed and went into effect in March of 2025.

In 2011, Jack and Danielle donated a CR on nine acres of their property and opened 203 acres for public access through the Volunteer Public Access (VPA) program, a project administered by FLT. Their land is a cherished space for the community.

"There's a hiking path along the river that extends beyond our property. It's also a major snowmobile trail. There's also a large sledding hill that has been popular for many years—long before we owned the land. Apart from that, the land has mainly been used by hunters during deer season" says Jack. "The trails were used a little before COVID, but during the pandemic, their usage really increased. People got into the habit of getting outside more, and they've continued to use them heavily since."

This newly conserved 65 acres includes farmland, wetlands, upland forest, and nearly half a mile of frontage along the South River, a historically significant waterway in Conway.

The South River has played a central role in Conway's development, once supporting mills and now serving as a vital ecological corridor. However, decades of human intervention—including the artificial straightening of the river—have left it vulnerable to erosion and flooding.

Nick Miller, a fluvial geomorphologist and FLT Board Member, has studied the South River for years. "When rivers are artificially straightened, they become 'flashy'—meaning water levels spike rapidly during storms, causing

significant erosion and flood damage downstream," Miller explains. "The Lochhead property contains a historic oxbow wetland, which provides an opportunity to restore the river's natural meanders and improve flood resilience."

Jack Lochhead echoed the concern. "Conway really grew as a mill town, and over the last 200 years, the South River has been manipulated in ways that aren't great for the river's health," he said. "Now, during heavy rainfall, it turns into a fast-moving torrent. If there were more natural bends in the river, it wouldn't erode the earth as aggressively as it does now. On our property, there's an old oxbow where the river once made a huge bend. There are current plans to try to redirect the river back to this old path, creating a more winding flow instead of the straight channel it has now. That's something we've tried to account for in our conservation plans. We're working with FRCOG and Field Geology Services to navigate the process."

By incorporating river management language into the CR, the Lochheads and FLT have ensured that future restoration efforts—such as adding fallen trees to slow water flow, can move forward in accordance with current regulations and guidelines.

The conservation restriction also allows for responsible land use. While much of the acreage will remain in its natural state, the Lochheads have included provisions to support sustainable agriculture and portions of the land are leased to a local farmer.

Jack Lochhead sees conservation as both a personal and community responsibility. "We didn't necessarily set out to conserve as much land as we have," he said. "But over time, we realized we didn't want to sell it off, and we really grew to love it. It's about keeping this place special—not just for us, but for everyone who enjoys it."



Enhancing Conservation Efforts

BY SEBASTIAN LAMONTAGNE

PHOTO: ALAIN PETEROY

At Franklin Land Trust, our conservation efforts are always evolving to meet the highest standards of land protection. The amendment to the Miller Conservation Restriction (CR) is an example of this ongoing commitment, ensuring that protected lands remain safeguarded for future generations while incorporating modern legal language for clarity and long-term security.

The original CR, donated in 1998 by Richard and Susan Todd, protected approximately 115-120 acres along Cummington Road in Ashfield. This CR was completed sometime before the state required that surveys be done to confirm the boundaries if the meets and bounds description of the property was poor. This led to boundary descriptions that lacked precision. Since then, land ownership has changed, and new opportunities have emerged to enhance the conservation protections on this property.

For Barbara Miller, who now stewards the land with her husband, the connection to this place was nearly instant.

Before moving into their current home, Barbara and Ken Miller owned a farm in New York. Then, Barbara, who had been working for NRCS, got a promotion to become

the GIS Specialist in the State office in Amherst, MA. All the while, she was still living in New York and managing the farm with Ken.

“When I first started working in Amherst, we still had our dairy farm in New York, and I was commuting 75 miles each way every day. I took every possible route to get back and forth and grew to really appreciate the hilltowns,” she recalls. “So, when we decided to sell the farm and find a new place to live, I knew I didn’t want to settle in the valley—it was too crowded, busy, and expensive, even back then, more than 20 years ago. My husband was already struggling with selling the farm, so I knew we needed a place with some land, even if we weren’t going to farm commercially.”

That place turned out to be a house she had passed by countless times, but never guessed would become her home.

“We ended up stumbling upon our home almost by chance,” she says. “I had been driving past it every day because taking that road shaved two miles off my commute. I had always wanted to live in an old house, and this one caught my eye. There was never a for-sale sign, but we

found out it was on the market anyway—and we just knew that was where we were meant to be.”

In 2004, they bought the farm from Richard and Susan Todd. Richard Todd was board president of the Franklin Land Trust from 2005 to 2008, and Barbara jokes that the position in which she succeeded Richard Todd comes with the house. “It’s kind of like a curse. You can’t leave until you find someone to buy the house and become board president!”

The completed amendment has not changed the core intent of the Todds original CR, but rather refined and strengthened it.

The rewritten CR includes a six-acre interior piece of land that was not included in the original CR, as well as an additional six-acre parcel that the Miller’s purchased to add onto the farm. This additional landlocked wetland area had been passed through multiple owners through the years—one of whom, according to local lore, won it in a poker game. The Millers acquired it for the cost of legal fees in 2016 to ensure it became part of the protected landscape.

The amended CR includes modern legal language that aligns with today’s CR standards, reinforcing long term protections. The amendment has also confirmed and mapped building envelopes using GPS technology to ensure clear and accurate designations for the barn and house lot, replacing older, less precise descriptions.

This property holds significant ecological value, as it lies within the BioMap2 Core Habitat and Critical Natural Landscape and abuts the Swift River Wildlife Management Area. Its protection contributes to the health of the Swift River and Crockett Meadow, vital tributaries of the Westfield River. Barbara has seen otters, wood ducks, and other species relying on the ecosystem’s mix of uplands and wetlands.

While they did not place the original CR, Ken and Barbara’s deep appreciation for the land and conservation has made them natural caretakers of it.



A Land Ethic

BY WILL SLOAN ANDERSON

With the recent acquisition of Spring Hill, Spruce Corner, and Edge Hill conservation areas (CAs) we are in the process of developing management plans for these projects and updating plans for the other conservation areas that total over 1,200 acres. We endeavor to manage these areas with an eye towards their land use history, their greater context in the wider landscape, and their unique resource management opportunities.

I am often reminded of Aldo Leopold's essay "The Land Ethic," when we think about how we approach managing these CAs. His argument is that we have an ethical responsibility to each other and society as a whole. The "Golden Rule" if you will. A moral, social contract to one another. Leopold argues that "Land" should benefit from this ethic as well. This is not a hands-off approach but rather an approach that seeks to mitigate, improve, and enhance the resources, habitats, and beauty of the land. A love for the land. I also believe that such an ethic recognizes the resources we require from the land. Wood, food, fiber as well as beauty, ecological function, and health.

In addition to this principle as our guiding force with regard to our CAs management, we also use this principle with regard to how we provide opportunities for the public to experience our CAs. Many have noted that we don't have many trails on our CAs. This is somewhat purposeful. We hope that people will experience our lands with some wild abandon.

Luckily, we are in a very rural area and we don't have extremely high use and impact on our CAs. We hope that people will explore and take the deliberate time to experience these lands. Exploration that the visitor takes the time to experience. We have provided a land etiquette guide on the following page.

These guidelines relate to visiting our CAs, as well as private land in general. CR owners and private landowners have the fundamental right to privacy. It should never be assumed that access is allowed. We hope that visitors help to make Aldo Leopold's land ethic a reality and treat FLT's CAs and other private lands with the respect we all endeavor to show one another and our community at large.



Land Use Etiquette

for CONSERVATION AREAS
& PRIVATELY OWNED LAND

Conservation Areas (CAs) *Owned by Franklin Land Trust (FLT)*

- ▶ FLT requests that all visitors follow the specific rules and guidelines for each of our Conservation Areas.
- ▶ Be mindful of all users, including hikers, hunters, skiers, and anglers.
- ▶ Respect others' outdoor activities. Safety should always come first, and it's important to be considerate of people with different interests.
- ▶ Be considerate of other user groups. For example:
 - Keep a safe distance from hunters.
 - Avoid early morning walks on the opening day of hunting season.
 - Allow skiers to pass when using shared trails.
 - Keep dogs on a leash to prevent conflicts.
- ▶ Practice the "Carry In, Carry Out" policy: clean up after yourself, including dog waste, picnic items, and shell casings.
- ▶ Report any safety concerns or issues to FLT.
- ▶ Respect tenants conducting land management activities, such as haying or maple sugaring.
- ▶ Avoid FLT staff or contractors while they are working on management operations.

Privately Owned Land *Conserved by FLT with a Conservation Restriction (CR)*

- ▶ Privately owned land conserved by FLT is not necessarily open to the public. While some landowners may choose to post their land, others allow visitors to recreate there. But it's important not to make assumptions.
- ▶ Always ask the landowner for permission before walking on private land (including land protected by FLT). This could also be a great opportunity to meet your neighbor!
- ▶ If a public access trail exists on private property, stay on the designated trail and follow the trail-use guidelines.
- ▶ Do not alter the land in any way.
- ▶ Report any safety concerns to the landowner or FLT.
- ▶ Always thank the landowner for granting permission to access their property.





Forests for Fish – Getting our Feet Wet

BY EMILY BOSS

In the face of climate change, fish need our help.

Wild brook trout populations in the Deerfield River watershed of western Massachusetts depend on small headwater streams and the forested landscape which provide these streams with shade, nutrients, and stability. Coldwater fish such as brook trout, mottled sculpin, and darters are keystone species. Habitat restoration which helps them also benefits birds, insects, and other wildlife. The creation of diverse riffle, run, and pool habitats, protection of shade and cold water seeps, reconnection of floodplains, and protection of river systems or riparian areas from development all allow our natural landscapes to respond dynamically to floods, and help local community infrastructures become more climate change resilient.

Private landowners make up the majority of those managing our region's forest land. They have an opportunity to make a difference for cold water stream habitat. Modeling our approach on the successful Forests for the Fish program developed by the Vermont Audubon Society and adapted to Massachusetts and other states, Massachusetts Woodland Institute and Franklin Land Trust are partnering with the National Chapter of Trout Unlimited to create booklets on riparian habitat restoration called "Forests for Fish."

These booklets inform landowners and forest professionals about riparian wildlife and habitat. The first, "The Streamer's Dozen", will help landowners learn about the native fish, insects, birds, and mammals that thrive in the

Instream Wood Loading

Partnering with a local landowner in September 2024, the Franklin Land Trust and the Trout Unlimited teams provided a demonstration of the habitat restoration practice of instream wood loading - the careful installation of trees or large wood (over 6 inches in diameter and over 6 feet long) into a small scale waterway done in accordance with all state, local and federal regulations, with proper permitting. This wood will help create deep pools to keep fish cool in hot summers, encourage floodplain reconnection, and increase the diversity of habitat for native coldwater fish in the reach.

small headwater streams of our region. "A Riparian Assessment and Management Guide" provides information about how to be active around streams and brooks to protect and restore their functioning. "The Big Picture" puts this habitat work in context with past land use and the impacts of climate change.

We are beginning to spread the word about Forests for Fish. We plan to print and distribute full-color informational toolkit booklets as well as design and install interpretive materials at a demonstration site held by Frank-



lin Land Trust in the lower Deerfield River Watershed region. In addition, we are hosting workshops for land stewards and land management professionals to see practical implementation of the techniques. The Crowningshield Conservation Area (CCA), a 250-acre forested property owned by the Franklin Land Trust in Heath, MA will be an important demonstration site for this outreach effort.

Let us know if you'd like to get copies of these booklets, and be added to a mailing list for events and more information.



Massachusetts Woodlands Institute

IN AFFILIATION WITH FRANKLIN LAND TRUST

The Massachusetts Woodlands Institute (MWI) is a nonprofit subsidiary of Franklin Land Trust (FLT) housed in the FLT offices in Shelburne Falls, MA. We connect our parent organization, Franklin Land Trust, with people in the community who are responsible for the long-term management of the landscape: families, farms, rural businesses and recreational and wildlife groups.

masswoodlandsinstitute.org

Event Highlights

Visit our website to discover more about our upcoming programs, and be sure to pre-register for these events as they open.

franklinlandtrust.org/events



NATURE EXPLORER SERIES

with *Naturalist Cesi Marseglia*

The Forest Awakens: Vernal Pools and Early Birds

Saturday, April 19 | 10-11:30am

Betty Maitland Memorial Forest, Heath

Join the FLT at the Betty Maitland Memorial Forest to learn about vernal pool ecology. Frog and salamander egg masses await! Bring footwear that can get muddy, and your binoculars!

Spring Ephemerals Walk

Saturday, May 3 | 10-11:30am

Walnut Hill Woods, Buckland

Embark upon a spring ephemeral walk like no other at Walnut Hill Woods in Buckland. Well over a dozen species of spring ephemerals are present at this abundant site, along with many of their minute pollinator.

Welcome Home: A Migratory Bird ID Walk

Saturday, May 17 | 10-11:30am

Guyette Farm, Plainfield

Scads of warblers, swallows, kestrels, and woodcocks; a profusion of birds migrates back to Western Massachusetts in the springtime. Come welcome them home at Guyette Farm in Plainfield. Learn how to identify migratory birds by song and sight, and delight in their colorful return north. Don't forget to bring your binoculars!



FARM TOUR SERIES

Pioneer Gardens Farm Tour

Friday, July 18 | Time TBD

Pioneer Gardens, Deerfield

Founded by Jaap Molenaar, Pioneer Gardens has grown from a small nursery in Deerfield into one of the region's leading horticultural farms, supplying flowers for retailers across the country. Pioneer Gardens also grows rooftop gardens using transportable interlocking panels carried by truck to cities across the Northeast, where they are hoisted aloft by cranes and installed on rooftops. These living roofs are essentially pre-planned kits, at the cutting edge of urban greening

Bar-Way Farm Tour

Date & Time TBD

Bar-Way Farm, Deerfield, Massachusetts

Established in 1919 and currently helmed by Steven Melnik and his son, Peter, Bar-Way Farm spans 600 acres of fertile cropland. Experience firsthand the daily operations of this multi-generational dairy farm. As proud members of the Dairy Farmers of America (DFA), Bar-Way Farm combines a history of traditional farming with cutting-edge technology, including a methane digester for sustainable farming practices.

Ciesluk Farm Tour

Date & Time TBD

Deerfield North Meadows

Come explore this 166-acre historic treasure, set against the scenic backdrop of the Deerfield River. Originally founded by Frank E. Ciesluk in the early 20th century, this multi-generational farm is now lovingly maintained by his grandchildren, Michael Antonellis and his sister Jennifer. On this tour, we'll visit land conserved by FLT in 2024, along with parcels conserved by Historic Deerfield, some of which are farmed by the Antonellis siblings. John Davis, President of Historic Deerfield, will share insights into the land's rich indigenous and colonial history.



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Give Back TO THE LAND

**Save The Date!
April 22, 2025**

Join us for our sixth annual "Give Back to The Land Day" on April 22nd! The event, which falls on Earth Day, will be a 24-hour online giving day to raise funds for the work of the Franklin Land Trust, as well as for other local nonprofits, that all work to conserve the fields, forests, farms, and waterways in Massachusetts. Generous donors are matching online donations made before midnight on April 22nd!



D2R2
20TH ANNIVERSARY!

August 23, 2025

Get ready to celebrate, because D2R2 2025 is shaping up to be unforgettable! We're marking 20 incredible years since this iconic ride first rolled through the scenic hilltowns. This year's Mystery Ride promises to be something truly special—a spectacular 200k route designed by Sandy himself, spotlighting the amazing conservation efforts of the Franklin Land Trust.