

Franklin Land Trust

Conserving Farms, Fields & Forests Since 1987

FALL 2025

LANDS FOR H.O.P.E.

*The Homesteaders on Tunnel Road
A Little Piece of New England
Stream Restoration in Action*



FRANKLIN LAND TRUST

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

This fall, we're excited to share our new Lands for H.O.P.E. initiative, which reflects Franklin Land Trust's core values: Habitat, Outreach, Protection, and Education.

Conservation doesn't end with protecting a parcel of land—it begins there. Once a piece of land is conserved, the real work starts: restoring and maintaining habitats, and educating the public about how smart land management can benefit the overall ecosystem.

That's the purpose of our Lands for H.O.P.E. initiative—to make our Conservation Areas into *demonstration landscapes* where sustainable management can be experienced and learned from.

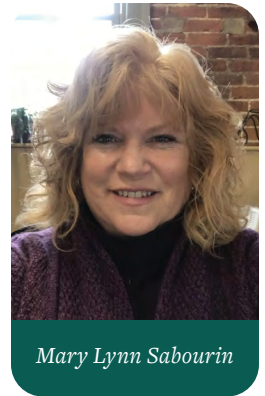
With support from the Woodlands Partnership, we've begun creating kiosks that provide background on the land management occurring on those properties. At Crowningshield, visitors can learn about cold-water streams and our collaborative *Forest for the Fish Toolkit*. At Guyette, a kiosk will soon highlight the connections among fields, shrublands, young forests, and mature forests. And at Edge Hill, we'll be focusing on future wetlands restoration and the creation of large grassland habitats. Together, these properties serve as living demonstrations of how land can be managed with resilience and biodiversity in mind—examples that landowners can draw from on their own land.

In 2025, we have helped to conserve 800 acres. Behind every conservation success is a human story. This year, two such stories stood out in particular.

Judson DeCew had long dreamed of a "little piece of New England," complete with brooks, meadows, and forests to call his own. In pursuing that vision, he came to see how quickly such landscapes—and the way of life they support—are disappearing. By placing his property under permanent protection, he has ensured that his land will remain part of the New England landscape for generations to come.

For Billy and Leonda Hardison, conservation came at a moment of transition. After more than five decades of self-sufficient living on their Tunnel Road homestead, the realities of age and the cost of maintaining a remote property—especially a bridge in need of repair—made it clear the time had come to move on. Working with FLT, and with support from Mass Audubon's 30x30 Catalyst Fund, the family found a solution that honored both land and legacy: protecting 82 acres of forest as forever wild while retaining a small house lot and river frontage for family use.

Together, these stories remind us that conservation is never only about land—it is about the people whose lives are tied to it, and the choices they make to ensure that these places remain part of our shared future. Franklin Land Trust is here to work closely with families like these while they make those choices, so that they can do what's best for them, as well as for the land they love.

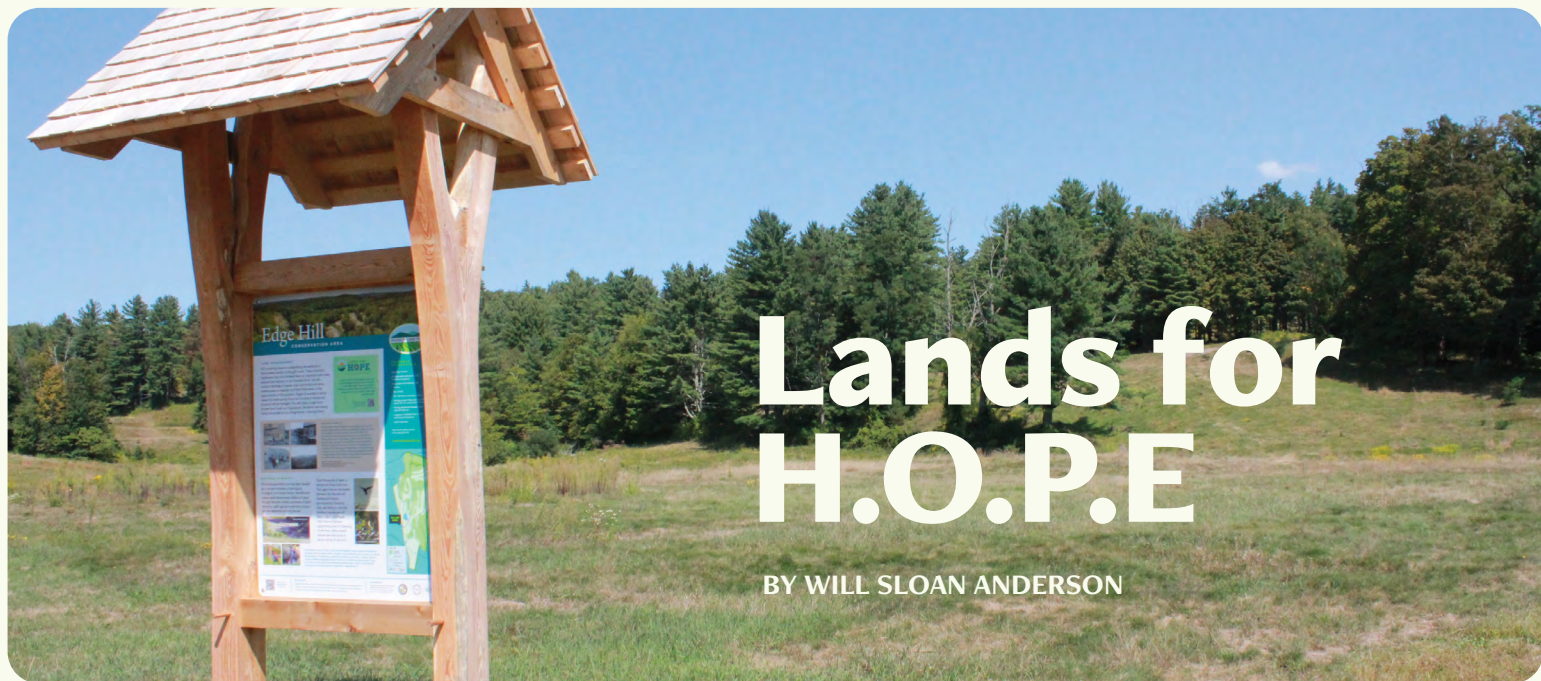


Mary Lynn Sabourin

With warmest regards,

Mary Lynn Sabourin

ON THE COVER:
PAINTING BY BILLY LANE HARDISON
PHOTOGRAPHED BY CRYSTAL HARDISON



Lands for H.O.P.E.

BY WILL SLOAN ANDERSON

OVER THE YEARS, FRANKLIN LAND TRUST HAS acquired or been gifted 19 Conservation Areas (CAs) totaling 1,370 acres, and facilitated 169 Conservation Restrictions (CRs) totaling 10,713 acres. On these lands, FLT has engaged in a wide range of management activities, often in partnership with resource professionals, to understand the condition of our CAs and identify environmental threats.

This work has taken many forms. With Trout Unlimited (TU), FLT collaborated on cold-water resource research that inspired the Forest for the Fish Toolkit. With the Ruffed Grouse Society and American Woodcock Society, FLT created early successional habitats for upland bird species. With Dr. Robert Gegear, FLT conducted bumblebee surveys that directly informed pollinator plantings at the Crowningshield Conservation Area, and we have designated wildlands on one CA due to its isolated bedrock and mesic soils that support vulnerable ecological communities. FLT has also carried out timber harvests, timber stand improvements, the creation and maintenance of shrubland habitats, and the management of open fields through biannual and semiannual mowings.

In 2024, FLT launched Lands for H.O.P.E.—Habitat, Outreach, Protection, and Education—to unify these efforts and share their lessons with the public. Funded in part by grants from the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs through the Woodland Partnership of Northwestern Massachusetts, this initiative seeks to transform FLT’s CAs into demonstration landscapes where visitors can learn about the conservation practices that sustain resilient ecosystems.

- ▶ **Habitat:** FLT manages our CAs with a landscape-level perspective, asking what habitats are missing and how to restore them. At Edge Hill in Ashfield, for example, FLT is working to reestablish wetlands and grasslands alongside upland habitats, while at Guyette in Plainfield, the team is balancing open fields, shrubland, young forest, and mature forest to support biodiversity across successional stages.
- ▶ **Outreach:** FLT is creating Lands for H.O.P.E. events at these properties, designed to help community members see how management practices can be adapted to their own lands. These events, paired with on-the-ground demonstrations, will bring landowners and resource experts together to share knowledge.
- ▶ **Protection:** At its core, FLT’s mission remains protecting land. Our portfolio of CAs and CRs safeguards vital forests, fields, wetlands, rivers, and ridges while also demonstrating proactive, long-term stewardship.
- ▶ **Education:** Educational kiosks are being developed at several CAs to explain FLT’s work. At Crowningshield in Heath, visitors can learn about cold-water resources and the Forests for the Fish Toolkit. At Guyette, a kiosk will showcase how multiple habitat types connect with each other and the surrounding landscape. Over time, FLT plans to expand this network with kiosks at Nan Williams in Rowe (wildlands), Edge Hill in Ashfield (wetlands and grasslands), and beyond. Visitors will also find links to online resources, in-depth materials, and handouts that highlight successes, challenges, and lessons learned.

Continued on page 5



The Homesteaders on Tunnel Road

BY SEBASTIAN LAMONTAGNE

BILLY HARDISON, AN ARTIST, AND WIFE LEONDA

Hardison, a musician who has played with the likes of Muddy Waters, moved to their Tunnel Road homestead in 1968 in search of a rural, creative life immersed in nature. “We wanted a place where we could raise our children in the country and give them the kind of life we grew up with,” Billy shared. Over five decades, they raised five children—all born in the house, four delivered by Billy himself—and stewarded their land with minimal disturbance.

The family’s connection to the property began with an unforgettable journey down the mountain in a Volkswagen Bug. “We were looking for a place to live and had heard of this house. So, we took a look at the map and saw we could come down Tunnel Road. The road got steeper and narrower, and there was no way to turn around,” Billy recalled. “I got out and built little bridgeways over the holes with stones... and we kept going.”

Now, after more than half a century, the Hardisons made the decision to conserve their 82-acre forest in Rowe, MA. “We knew we couldn’t live there forever,” Billy said. “The bridge across the river needed serious repairs... so this is going to help us resettle.” With the full support



Billy Hardison, Leonda Hardison, and Alain Peteroy

of their adult children, the family chose to protect the land while retaining a house lot and a small riverfront strip for continued family use. “I actually did talk to a logger... but the amount of money he said we’d get wasn’t worth it. And we didn’t really want to log it,” Billy reflected. “I’m happy that it went to you folks.”

On July 21, 2025, Franklin Land Trust permanently conserved the property, which abuts FLT’s Nan Williams Conservation Area. The land strengthens regional wildlife corridors and protects habitat for rare species, including bats that hibernate in the nearby Nan Williams cave. Recognized by the Massachusetts Natural Heritage and

Endangered Species Program for its BioMap Core Habitat and role in sustaining landscape connectivity, the forest drains directly into the Deerfield River, a Cold Water Fishery and designated Priority Habitat of Rare Species.

“Working with the Hardisons has been a true joy,” says

“Working with the Hardisons has been a true joy, Their self-reliance and dedication are deeply inspiring.”

Alain Peteroy, Deputy Director at FLT. “Their self-reliance and dedication are deeply inspiring. We’re grateful for the trust they’ve placed in us—it’s been a privilege to be part of this journey with them.”

FLT will manage the land as forever wild alongside the Nan Williams Conservation Area, with efforts focused on invasive species control and limited, safe public access.

This conservation success was made possible through a grant from the William P. Wharton Trust, an anonymous foundation grant and Mass Audubon’s 30x30 Catalyst Fund—a \$75 million initiative launched in 2024 to accelerate land conservation across Massachusetts. The fund supports the global “30x30” commitment adopted at COP 15 in 2022, which aims to protect 30% of lands and waters by 2030.

“The important forest on this 82-acre parcel was at risk of conversion, but is now preserved as habitat for rare bat species, recreation, environmental education opportunities, and to preserve the cold water fishery of the adjacent Deerfield River,” said David O’Neill, President & CEO of Mass Audubon. “Promoting regional connectivity between protected lands and protecting wildlife and biodiversity is precisely why the Catalyst Fund exists, and we’re thrilled we could play a small part in our partners’ amazing efforts to conserve this land.”

“This remarkable opportunity would not have been possible without the William P. Wharton Trust, Mass Audubon’s 30x30 Catalyst Fund and the generous support of the Anonymous Foundation,” says Mary Sabourin, Executive Director at FLT. “We’re deeply thankful for their partnership and vision in making this conservation project a success.”

FLT extends heartfelt thanks to the Hardison family for their decades of thoughtful land stewardship and for entrusting FLT with the permanent protection of this special place.

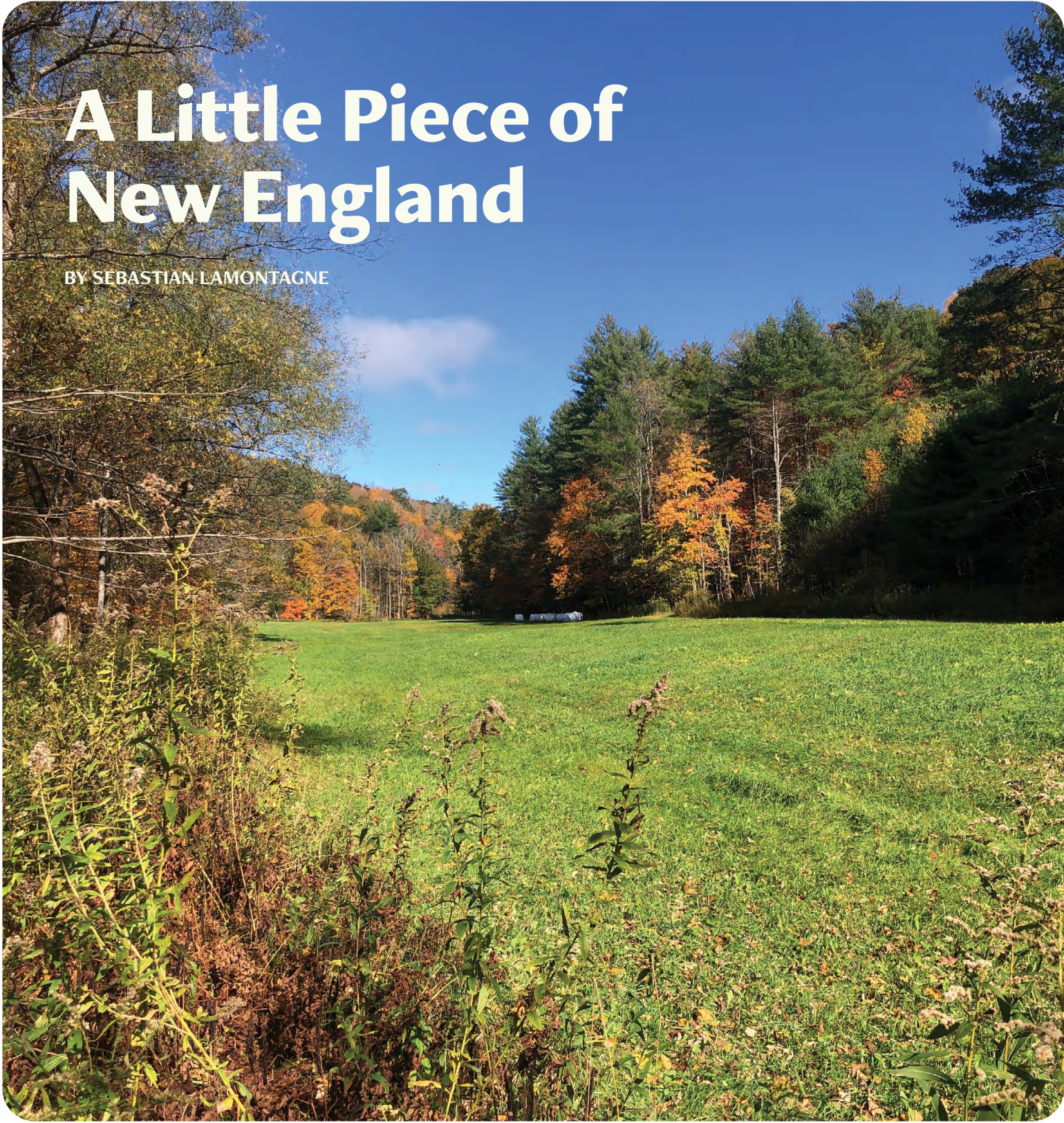
Lands for H.O.P.E. — *continued from page 3*

FLT envisions Lands for H.O.P.E. as a living library of conservation practices. Each CA is associated with a theme—cold-water resources at Crowningshield, upland bird habitat at Guyette, wildlands at Nan Williams, grasslands and wetlands at Edge Hill—so visitors can explore a variety of conservation values and learn how to manage them.

Most of these lands are not endowed, so projects rely on grants, timber revenues from sustainably harvested wood, and scaled approaches using tools and resources accessible to private landowners. By demonstrating what is possible on modest budgets and with common equipment, FLT hopes to inspire landowners to adopt similar stewardship practices.

The threats facing our forests and fields—climate change, invasive species, exotic pests, and declining species populations—are daunting. Yet FLT is surrounded by talented resource professionals, contractors, and community partners that have helped us to meet these challenges. Through Lands for H.O.P.E., FLT aims to turn that expertise into inspiration, building a more resilient landscape for the benefit of both our neighbors and wildlife. ■





A Little Piece of New England

BY SEBASTIAN LAMONTAGNE

THIS FALL, FRANKLIN LAND TRUST COMPLETED the permanent conservation of 93 acres of forest and farmland along Adamsville Road in Colrain, MA, owned by the Judson M. DeCew, Jr. Trust.

The land, spread across three parcels between Ed Clark Road and Hillman Road, includes about nine acres of hayfields and 84 acres of actively managed forest. The

property also contains about one mile of Tissdell Brook—a designated Coldwater Fisheries Resource that flows into the West Branch of the North River—providing clean, cold water essential for native brook trout and other wildlife.

Reflecting on how he came to own the property, Judson DeCew shared, “I had always wanted my little piece of New England, and used to spend a lot of time fishing, and

wandering through the countryside. But it took many years for that sort of dream to gain any substance. I married, had kids, lived in South America for a period, came back, lived in Florida, much against my will. Ultimately, I returned to this area, to New England, outside of Boston,

“The process of moving toward a CR would not have been remotely possible without Franklin Land Trust, not even conceivable. I wouldn’t have known where to begin!”

and our financial position improved. My rural dream was an idea we could entertain. So, we literally took a map of Massachusetts and said, ‘Where are there less roads rather than more roads? Where are the blank spaces?’ And there were three, very obvious blank spaces. One was in the Blackstone Valley. The other was around Quabbin. And then the third was out, if you will, in the hills. Up here.”

When he and his family began their search, they discovered “many properties that had a lot of acreage, but most of the housing was kind of beaten up. It had become very hard to make a living in this part of the world farming. And the families that held those properties had very little means to maintain the houses, so they tended to get very weathered over time, or even abandoned.”

Eventually, DeCew found what he was looking for. “We couldn’t find the right combination between enough acreage and a house in good enough condition until our real estate agent found a listing that seemed to fall in the sweet spot. We looked at the house, and the house had its issues, but it was dry. And even though it was a bit of a fixer upper, we thought, we can do this. And then what sealed the bargain was that I had spent a lot of my time fishing small trout streams. And what do you know? One went right through the middle of this place.”

He recalled his first impression of the land: “I remember walking out into the pasture area that’s behind the barn and house, and the grass was clean. In other words, it was waist high, but it was not brush filled. It had obviously been hayed. And there was a barter arrangement with the family down the road for that. So, I fell immediately in love. Here’s my water. I’ve got my meadow, and I’ve got a house that we can make a home.”

That hayfield continues to be maintained by the neighboring Herzig family, who own and operate West Branch Farm, under a long-standing handshake agreement. As DeCew described, “So they hay. And then in the fall, they’ll fence it off, or sections of it off, and bring in their birthing cattle and let them pasture freely in the meadow. So, I get manure, they get hay. They help me. If I didn’t have that agreement, how would I keep that field from becoming overgrown with brush. I mean, that’s what nature does—it’ll fill it in real quick.”

Much of the property has been identified as Prime Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance, and two-thirds of it is designated as Critical Natural Landscape under the state’s BioMap3 program, and its forest soils are classified as Prime Forest

Soils.

For DeCew, the decision to conserve the property stemmed from a deep awareness of the dangers facing shrinking rural landscapes.

“I’ve always had a sensitivity and a concern for the character of the countryside. I know you can’t keep everything as it is now, or put it back to the way it was. But I always knew if I had the chance, I would do what I could to conserve a piece. And this piece was attractive, given its position in a little valley, given the stream running down through it.”

The property, while not directly abutting other conserved lands, lies less than a mile from the 1,800-acre H.O. Cook State Forest and is also near Franklin Land Trust’s Crowningshield Conservation Area, helping to form a corridor linking protected habitats along the West Branch of the North River.

As DeCew noted, “You have a perennial cold water native brook trout stream. Those are rare and getting rarer.”

He also emphasized the role FLT played in making the conservation restriction possible: “The process of moving toward a CR would not have been remotely possible without Franklin Land Trust, not even conceivable. I wouldn’t have known where to begin!”

This project was generously supported by the Deerfield River Chapter of Trout Unlimited (TU), who helped FLT leverage \$5,000 from TU’s Land Conservancy Fund grant program to cover a portion of the cost of a boundary survey of the property. The Massachusetts Conservation Land Tax Credit Program will also provide the DeCews with some payment for their generous donation.

Stream Restoration in Action

BY EMILY BOSS

WHILE IN THE PROCESS OF CONSERVING THEIR land, Judson and Cameron DeCew hosted a workshop for neighbors and forest professionals to see headwater stream restoration in action.

The 93 forested and field acres they steward in Colrain, MA are crossed by Tissdell Brook, a coldwater brook trout fishery. Working with the DeCews, Franklin Land Trust, Mass Woodlands Institute (MWI) and Trout Unlimited demonstrated the habitat restoration practice of instream wood loading on the waterway, and debuted a resource toolkit called: “Forests for Fish.”

With all needed permits in hand, large trees were cut by an experienced professional and placed in the stream at carefully chosen sites. These trees will help create deep pools to keep fish cool in hot summers, encourage floodplain reconnection and increase diversity of habitat for brook trout and other native fish that depend on coldwater streams in the reach. These effects aid

hydrologic and habitat connectivity within the forested watershed, improving conditions for wildlife from moose to mayflies, from screech owls to salamanders.

The DeCews, twenty-four local residents and interested community members learned about stream ecology and riparian channel management. “In a time when climate change is putting increased pressures on brook trout and other native species in our region, conserving land and bringing complexity to small headwater streams can help these populations better survive the impact of floods and drought,” said, Emily Boss, Executive Director of MWI. “We are grateful to the DeCews for their commitment to thoughtful land stewardship and generosity in welcoming others to learn about what we can do together.”

This workshop and development of the toolkit were funded in part by Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture and Canaan Valley Institute through a grant awarded by the US Forest Service.



**Massachusetts
Woodlands
Institute**

IN AFFILIATION WITH FRANKLIN LAND TRUST

The Massachusetts Woodlands Institute (MWI) is a nonprofit subsidiary of Franklin Land Trust 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

There Are No Snakes in Rattlesnake Gutter

BY SEBASTIAN LAMONTAGNE

ON SEPTEMBER 3RD, FRANKLIN LAND TRUST placed a permanent Conservation Restriction (CR) on two adjoining properties in Leverett owned by Rattlesnake Gutter Trust (RGT)— the Whitney Road Conservation Area and the Marvell Family Conservation Area. Together, these lands total 46.1 acres of forest, ridges, and historic sites just north of the dramatic cliffs along the lower section of Rattlesnake Gutter.

Rattlesnake Gutter is a striking glacial ravine located in the town of Leverett, and likely formed when glacial meltwater or a temporary glacial lake broke through a fracture in the earth's crust that had previously restricted the flow of water.

While you don't need to worry about wearing snake boots while hiking near Rattlesnake Gutter, according to historical anecdote Rattlesnakes did once populate the ravine, providing it with its name.

RGT was formed out of efforts to protect Rattlesnake Gutter from development. "Back in the late 1980s, a 40-acre parcel that encompassed a large part of the ravine was about to be sold," trustee Eva Gibavic recalled. "A number of people came together to make sure it was saved. We helped raise money for the town to buy that property, and that was really the beginning."

That beginning quickly grew into a long-term commitment. "After that first project, another parcel came up and someone said, 'Well, you've shown interest—why don't you form a trust?' And so we did. Now, 36 years later, we own eleven properties," Gibavic explained.

Part of RGT's motivation for this project was to ensure its conservation holdings would be safe far into the future. "We knew that if RGT ever disbanded, the land we owned could be sold for development because they weren't under CR. We felt very strongly that should never happen. These places were meant to be protected."

The Whitney Road and Marvell Family Conservation Areas were especially compelling because of their ecological and recreational value. "The Marvell property sits next to the town-owned Rattlesnake Gutter Conservation Area we helped to protect, and conserving it secures a block of forest that will stay intact," said Gibavic. "It's also a place already used—regularly—by hikers." She added that "location was the primary factor. Protecting these parcels



helps knit together other conserved land, and keeps it open for hikers." This moment represents the culmination of years of collaboration between RGT and FLT.

Beyond their natural features, the abutting Whitney property contains important cultural history. "There's a historic cellar hole on the parcel, and unlike many that are hidden away and not easily accessible, this one is on a trail that people can actually access and enjoy. That was of real interest to us," Gibavic said. She also emphasized the foresight behind the trust's founding: "When RGT started, it wasn't that there was a big development boom yet—things in the '80s weren't that different from in the '60s and '70s—but we could see it coming. Protecting the Rattlesnake Gutter land was about making sure houses didn't get built in one of the town's most important natural and scenic areas."

The Whitney Road property, donated to RGT in 1999 by the developers of Ryan Hill, is home to the cellar hole and well of the historic Whitney homestead. The Marvell Family Conservation Area, purchased by RGT in 2002 from Alberta Marvell Cronen and Pascal Marvell, offers a series of ridges with sweeping views above the Gutter's cliffs. Both properties lie within the state's designated Biomap2 Critical Natural Landscape, and together they connect with thousands of acres of other conserved lands, including the 3,500-acre Brushy Mountain area.

Popular with hikers and bikers, the properties are bisected by an old road and provide year-round opportunities for recreation. The CR will allow RGT to continue maintaining trails, protecting cultural and historical features, and ensuring public access.

This project was made possible in part through funding from the Wharton Trust, which provided \$2,500 to support the stewardship of this CR.

Meet Our 2025 Interns



Pia D. Martin II

Pia Martin joined us at MWI, a subsidiary of FLT, as a summer intern in May. They are working on updating the MWI website to reflect the organization's many accomplishments, especially in their Forests for the Fish initiative, since the last major site update in 2020. These updates will make things even more streamlined for potential forests stewards and provide critical education to help them conserve their land. Pia also creates and updates materials such as flyers and internal resources for MWI and FLT. They grew up in Brooklyn, New York and Scotland Neck, North Carolina. The stark differences between these two places, and their family's historical connection with farming gave them a deep appreciation of conserved land. Pia graduated from UMass Amherst in 2022 with a B.Sc. in Natural Resource Conservation. They are interested in small mammal and forest ecology, and currently pursuing graduate school.



Becca Smith

Becca recently completed her M.S. in Sustainability Science at UMass Amherst with a concentration in Water Conservation and Climate Change. She is working on the Forests for the Fish program, a partnership between Franklin Land Trust, Massachusetts Woodlands Institute, and Trout Unlimited to enhance environmental quality and stream connectivity in the Deerfield River Watershed. Her research focuses on the social-ecological co-benefits of stream restoration - improving habitat for native coldwater fish populations while also reducing flood risk and enhancing resilience for local communities. Becca is synthesizing this work into a report designed to engage landowners, restoration professionals, and municipalities in integrating conservation and nature-based solutions into climate planning.

Outside of work, Becca is an avid swimmer, hiker, and kayaker who feels most at home on the water or in the woods. She is excited to be part of Franklin Land Trust's efforts to conserve the farms, forests, and wildlands that make western Massachusetts such a special place to live and explore.

Meet Our Youngest Land Steward

We are thrilled to share some joyful news: on July 20, our Land Steward, Alex Wahlstrom, and his wife Amber welcomed a beautiful new addition—Mabel Emery Wahlstrom. Both baby and parents are doing well, and we couldn't be happier for them as they begin this exciting new chapter together. Welcome to the stewardship team little Mabel.





D2R2

Recap

The Deerfield Dirt-Road Randonnée (D2R2) has come and gone. This was the ride's 20th anniversary.

As Franklin Land Trust's largest fundraiser, D2R2 is vital—providing nearly 30% of our annual budget and sustaining our work to conserve the natural landscapes of western Massachusetts.

This year's ride welcomed over 1,400 participants from 28 states and 3 countries, all drawn here by the beauty and challenge of our scenic landscapes and gravel roads. Riders shared stories of returning year after year, and of the friends who used to ride with them and have passed on. It was very moving seeing how this event has become a meaningful tradition in people's lives.

We are deeply grateful to every rider, volunteer, and staff member who made this milestone year possible. Your dedication and spirit are what make D2R2 so extraordinary.

We'd also like to thank this year's photographer, Josue Murillo, for his excellent pictures. You can view more of his D2R2 photos at www.jbstudiosfilm.com.





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GIVING TUESDAY

December 2, 2025

With your support, conserved land can provide locally sourced food, clean water, and fresh air. It can be a healthy home for wildlife, and a place of wonder and exploration for you. You can make a difference for the land, your family, and your future. #GivingTuesday is a global giving movement that helps our communities locally. On #GivingTuesday and all year round, your support for the conservation work of Franklin Land Trust provides a tangible and critical benefit to the local landscape, for your family and for your community.

Visit franklinlandtrust.org/givingtuesday

Or send your contribution to:

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