



The Northern Rivers Land Trust

Newsletter

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www.northernriverslandtrust.org

May 2018

Annual Meeting Sunday June 10

6 p.m. at the Craftsbury Public Library.

Keynote speaker **Bill Mares** will present

"Bees Besieged: A History of Beekeeping"

This program comes through the Vermont Humanities Council and is co-hosted by the library.

Refreshments and great company guaranteed!

Two NRLT Conservation Projects in Wolcott

As of spring 2018, the NRLT was focusing on two potential conservation easements in Wolcott. One concerned protection of a large portion of the shoreline of Wolcott Pond by Steve Young and his wife Jan Roy. Some 1,500 feet of the shoreline has already been conserved by Steve's brother and sister-in-law, Oran Young and Gail Osherenko, through a conservation easement with the Vermont Land Trust, and by the State of Vermont Fish Wildlife Department.

On pages 3 and 4 look for an essay on Wolcott Pond by Steve Young, which also describes the initiative he and Jan are taking to protect another half mile of pond shorefront. This they are doing by donating to NRLT a conservation easement on approx. 100 acres they have long owned and a small additional piece they are in the process of acquiring.

NRLT's second project in Wolcott concerns a 170-acre parcel on Town Hill Road, owned by the Bertocci family (see aerial photo above). The parcel contains 105 acres of productive forest including sugar bush, 63 acres of productive agricultural land including a 4-acre Christmas tree plantation (approximately 2,000 trees), and a small pond. It offers beautiful views of the Green Mountains.

The Bertocci brothers and sisters have generously agreed to donate the easement in memory of their father Angelo, an Italian immigrant who grew up imaginatively in the wilderness of James Fenimore Cooper, and their mother Aili Kaukonen, a Finnish immigrant raised on a farm in Andover, Vermont. The easement will form NRLT's largest conservation project thus far.



Bertocci property on Town Hill Road in Wolcott

Susan Sawyer's Natural History Book

Many NRLT members have already purchased this 134-page volume by Woodbury naturalist Susan Sawyer (see below). Copies are still available for \$25 at Willey's Store and Galaxy Bookshop. NRLT is reprinting it.

Susan worked on and off for four years to produce this highly original study of our region, which features 90+ color photographs. Susan begins by tracing the geology of the region, identifying two bedrock types that meet approximately in its middle. Taking her cue from the title of our land trust, she then discusses the three rivers—Lamoille, Winooski, and Black—whose waters originate in the region, as well as the origin of our 50-odd natural lakes and ponds—half located in Woodbury.

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About the NRLT

The NRLT is a partnership of people working together to ensure that, as Vermont changes, rural land in our region is not lost to development. Using legal tools called “conservation easements” or “grants of development rights,” the NRLT and its sister land trusts help landowners to voluntarily limit development while keeping the land open for forestry, farming, and recreation. The landowner decides whether to allow public access.

Conservation in the NRLT region. According to the adjacent table, since the NRLT’s founding in 2007, landowners in seven towns have conserved 680 acres with it. The Vermont Land Trust is the agency with the largest acreage of conserved land in the NRLT’s original seven towns, with 10,464 acres or half of the total.

As of early 2018, slightly over 11 per cent of the subregion’s total area was conserved. Following the VLT in importance is the state of Vermont, whose Wildlife Management Areas in Walden, Stannard and Wolcott account for a quarter of conserved land. The Nature Conservancy’s two preserves, both in Greensboro, measure 1,023 acres.

The only single-town land trust in the area, Greensboro’s, has conserved 1,120 acres. In addition, Craftsbury and Woodbury own town forests, and the University of Vermont owns a plot in Wolcott.

The Land Trust Alliance (LTA). This body is the umbrella organization for the land trusts mentioned above and indeed for over a thousand land trusts across the country. It has established an Accreditation Commission under which close to 400 land trusts have been accredited since 2007. In 2013 it established a “captive” insurance program, Terrairma, which pays legal fees above \$5,000 to protect against violation of easement conditions. NRLT is a member of Terrairma.

Donating conservation easements. Although not ordinarily reducing property taxes, easement donations qualify as charitable contributions for federal and state income and estate taxes. They can be deducted from adjusted gross income (AGI) at up to 50% of AGI per annum, and spread over 15 years.

We work with landowners who love their land and want to see it conserved. We share projects with the Vermont Land Trust, which receives funding from the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, the Freeman Foundation, and private donors. But mainly we rely on funds raised from residents and friends of the towns we serve. In 2016, ninety-three households and businesses donated a total of \$9,710.

We talk regularly with potential conservators, and incur expenses for appraisals, surveys and stewardship. You can help by sending a check to **NRLT, Box 112, Hardwick, 05843.**

**We've Celebrated 10 Years...
Help Fund Future Conservation
Actions. Please remember
Northern Rivers Land Trust
in your Estate Planning**

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NRLT Conservation Easements

(listed by date of closing)

Landowner	Date	Town	Acres
Andrew Meyer	1997*	Hardwick	21
Paul Cillo	Dec. 2007	Hardwick	18
M.J. Dexter	Feb. 2010	Wolcott	94
Heartbeet Lifesharing	Dec. 2011	Hardwick	75
Pat Gahagan	Dec. 2011	Woodbury	93
David Ely	Aug. 2012	Wolcott	22
Lisa Lammi	Oct. 2012	Hardwick / Woodbury	33
Chris & Louisa Martin	Dec. 2014	Glover	35
Allison Van Akkeren	Dec. 2015	Lowell	87
Henry Coe	Dec. 2015	Albany	136
Bob Shay	Sept. 2016	Stannard	64
TOTAL			680

*first conserved with Greensboro Land Trust, transferred to NRLT in 2008

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www.northernriverslandtrust.org

Wolcott Pond

by Steve Young

Wolcott Pond isn't on the way to anywhere, which is a good thing. There are no roads along its shore and no lines of camps on fifty-foot-wide lots; the few rustic buildings are mostly hidden in the forest.

A few decades ago the State of Vermont bought shoreline and adjacent land, put in a fishing access^{some} area and built a dam—not to change the water level, but to avert a supposed threat to Wolcott Village by the Pond Brook, should the natural dam fail. The beavers have their own ideas about this, and they keep the water level a foot or two above the State's dam.



Wolcott Pond in summer

Things change slowly at Wolcott Pond. A friend who is in her 70s remembers being terrified, as a small child, of the trunk of a fallen tree that protrudes into the pond and looks vaguely like an alligator. The old snag is still there, unchanged, a basking spot for painted turtles.

At the other end of the pond is a rowboat graveyard, where the ghostly carcasses of old wooden boats from the days when a local farmer rented out rowboats to fishermen for 25 cents a day lie, still clearly visible in the shallows. One wonders how the derelicts all arrived at that particular spot.

One change that has occurred is the current profusion of white waterlilies. My friend's mother introduced a few plants a couple of generations ago, and they have slowly claimed the shoreline, mostly replacing the yellow spatterdock waterlilies that were prevalent when I first knew the pond, nearly 70 years ago.

Another change is the annual arrival of a breeding pair of loons. They first showed up in 1988; until then there is no record of loons on the pond since the building of the first camp, about 1911. Moose are also relative newcomers (or recolonists,) and one was seen being pursued across the pond by a pack of wild canids (presumably eastern coyotes) a couple of years ago—more newcomers.

And just last fall I watched an osprey catch a fish, the first time I'd see that for many decades; a few days later three young otters played around our shoreline and then



Wolcott Pond loons (photo by Orah Moore)

made their way unhurriedly across the pond, making me wonder how otters and late-fledging loon chicks get along together.

Many of the most interesting features and inhabitants of Wolcott Pond are subtle and secretive. If you canoe in the shallow water near shore in September, you may see small floating plants that resemble green spiders. These are quillworts (*Isoltes*), which are living fossils, descendants of the ancient forest trees whose trunks, leaves (and spores,) fossilized some 300 million years ago, are the main constituents of the Appalachian coal deposits. Why they uproot themselves each fall is a mystery; perhaps they disperse their spores that way.

You may find sundews, and even tiny orchids, on an old, half-submerged tree trunk. Perhaps the shyest inhabitants are the snapping turtles; females emerge every year or so



to try to find a patch of sand or gravel in which to lay their eggs, most of which the raccoons get. I have pictures of a turtle whose head was larger than my fist,

and whose forelegs were covered with bright orange scales. I'm sure she weighed well over 50 pounds. She is probably still lurking somewhere in the muddy depths of the pond, but no human may ever see her again.

In mid-June, if you know where to look, you can find the rosy-pink flowers of wild azaleas; they smell a bit like cloves. Typically a more southern Appalachian species, they are found only at this one station in northern Vermont. June is also a good time to stay on, late into the evening, and listen to the bullfrog chorus.

Wolcott Pond is about a mile long, if you measure in a curved line; it has a surprisingly small drainage area, with only a few tiny streams, hardly more than rivulets in the summer, feeding it. Old timers used to say that there was a 'bottomless' spring somewhere in the depths, but we once made a careful survey and never found a spot more than about 30 feet deep.



Marshland at eastern end of Wolcott Pond

There are some fairly extensive wetlands, full of redwing blackbirds and other, quieter, birds in spring. The boggy areas are very hard of access, at least for humans; there are probably some botanical and ornithological secrets yet to be discovered.

My own connection with Wolcott Pond goes back to about 1949; I remember going fishing with a friend when I was ten or so. Shortly thereafter, my father came home one day and dunned me, my brother, and some cousins five dollars each, to pay for a rowboat (35 dollars, including hand hewn oars—I still have one of them!)

My father, helped by his brothers, had scraped up a few hundred dollars to buy an old farm—worn out land and a cutover sugar place—from an old man who didn't want to let it go for back taxes. Included was some quarter mile of frontage on Wolcott Pond. Some 20 years later I had finished graduate school and we could afford to buy the land—at least at a 'family' price.

With the help of some friends we built our own rustic camp, back in the trees where it was inconspicuous. That's almost fifty years ago now, and the number of friends and neighbors who have come swimming, or spent a night, or a couple of weeks, in the camp must now number in the hundreds. We're on the fourth generation of Wolcott Pond lovers in our family.

We've come to realize that pristine, nearly undeveloped ponds in Vermont have become a rarity, and Wolcott

Pond is truly a gem among them. Over the years friends and family members have made it possible for much of the shoreline to be protected by conservation easements (a good portion is also owned by the State of Vermont, so appears to be safe from development.)



Black lines delineate parcel Steve & Jan plan to conserve

We will soon be taking the final legal steps to conserve indefinitely another major, critical half mile of shoreline and major part of the watershed. We are hoping, though, that this is part of a work in progress. In future issues of this newsletter, we expect to tell you about additional efforts to protect some important adjacent areas of wild country in the heart of the Northern Rivers Land Trust region.



Steve Young, Jan Roy and Dougal in front of house largely built by Steve & Jan