



# The Northern Rivers Land Trust *Newsletter*

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[www.NorthernRiversLandTrust.org](http://www.NorthernRiversLandTrust.org)

May 2020

## Message from NRLT Chair Jack Travelstead

The NRLT Trustees hope this message finds you safe and well.

So much has changed in recent weeks as we all adapt to the new reality brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic. There has certainly been time to think, and to reflect, on what is really important in life. And that, we are sure, includes our members and friends. You have made us what we are today. Many of you have been with us since our beginning, in 2007. Others have joined more recently. To all, we say thank you for your loyalty and for your support of our mission: to protect and enhance the natural and human resources in the headwaters of the Winooski, Lamoille and Black Rivers, to preserve all types of wild nature, and to conserve agricultural and forest lands and encourage their productive use.



2008--Paul Cillo & Mark McGrath view NRLT's first conservation easement, Cillo's land on Hardwick's Bridgman Hill Road

The NRLT Board of Trustees, though not meeting face-to-face, continues to stay busy. Unfortunately, our Annual Membership Meeting, usually scheduled for mid-June, has been delayed until further notice. We will give plenty of notice when it is rescheduled.

Other trustees are working to complete a redesign of the NRLT website. In addition to the usual annual updates, we hope to present a more interesting and

informative website soon. We believe our members will find the new site contains answers to all of their conservation easement questions.

The Trustees have long recognized the need for advisors with specific skills that broaden the knowledge base of this organization. Recently, the Trustees adopted a policy that calls for the addition of advisors with skills in a variety of areas, from ecology to accounting. We are most grateful that Kiley Briggs, Farley Brown, Kyle Gray, David Gross, Bruce Lindwall, and Kristina Michelson have agreed to serve as new advisors. We are equally thankful that Judy Davis, Ann Ingerson, Jennifer Lucas, David McMath, Susan Sawyer and Liz Chehayl have agreed to continue to serve as advisors. We welcome all to our new advisory panel.



As it flows under Wolcott's East Hill Road, Tamarack Brook begins its trek towards Bear Swamp. See page 4.

***Our Annual Meeting, regularly scheduled in June, has been postponed until further notice***

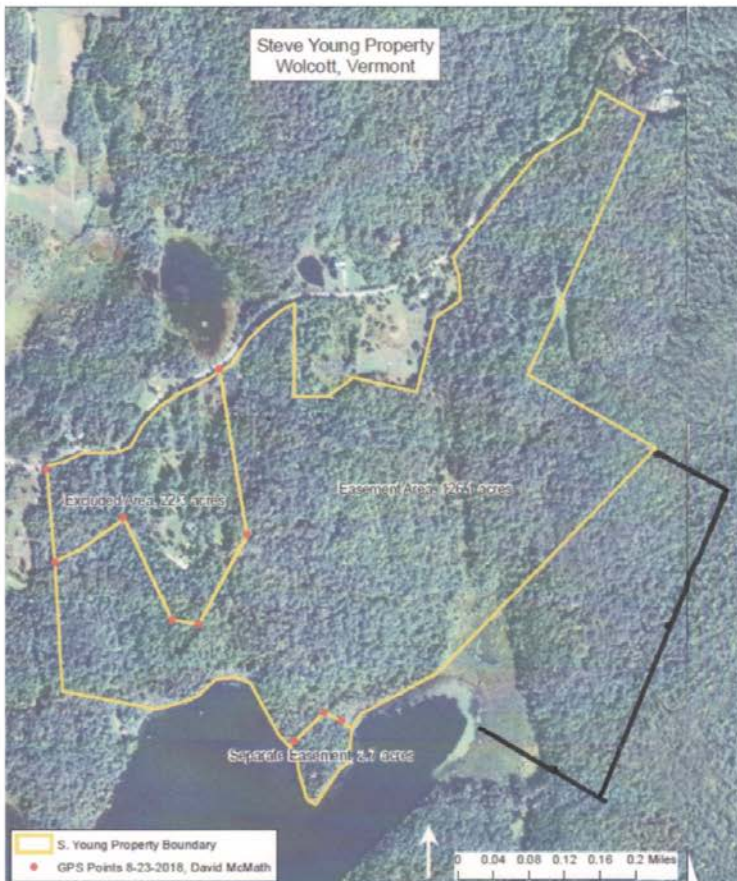
# Wolcott Pond

Wolcott Pond is a semi-wild, 73-acre body of water accessible from East Hill Road in the east-central section of Wolcott. The East Hill Wildlife Management Area (WMA), owned by the State of Vermont, borders on the pond's western branch, but most of the shoreline is privately owned by the Oran and Steve Young families. In 2012 Oran and his wife Gail Osherenko donated a conservation easement on most of the southern shore to the Vermont Land Trust.

Now Steve, his wife Jan Roy and their son Gordon are in the process of donating three conservation easements covering most of the northern shore, or ever half a mile, to the Northern Rivers Land Trust (NRLT). Gordon's portion abuts the VLT easement. Extending inland, two of the easements cover much of the pond's drainage area. It is hoped to complete the process by September 2020.

The map below shows the land they are conserving, totaling roughly 175 acres. Once this easement is executed, over 80 percent of the pond's shoreline will be conserved forever. NRLT has long sought to conserve this pond, which features only four small off-the-grid cabins, and for several years has harbored a loon family along with many other wildlife species. Our land trust is therefore most grateful to the Youngs for this generous gift.

NRLT has also commissioned a detailed report on Wolcott Pond's natural and cultural history by staff and students of Sterling College, which should likewise be completed by September.



Jan Roy, Steve Young and the late Dougal



Gordon Young's wetland at Wolcott Pond's eastern tip

The Youngs' three conservation easements, covering (1) 126 acres owned by Steve and Jan, (2) 2.7 acres owned by them jointly with their son Gordon, and (3) 50 acres+/- owned solely by Gordon (black lines). Acreages and boundary lines are approximate.

## About the NRLT

The NRLT is a partnership of people working 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 helps landowners to voluntarily limit development while keeping the land open for forestry, farming, and recreation. The landowner decides whether to allow public access.

The adjacent table shows that, in the 13 years since our first project in 2007, we have conserved 774 acres with easements on twelve properties in eight towns. All these easements have been donated to NRLT by landowners attached to their land and desiring to see it kept open in perpetuity. We have also contributed to a Vermont Land Trust easement in Hardwick.

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.

### *New NRLT Trustee*



**Alex Peltz** grew up in Woodbury and attended Hazen Union before earning his BA in Anthropology from Hamilton College in Clinton, NY. He spent 16 years in Philadelphia, working at Design for Social Impact as a creative director, before starting his own graphic design practice. His area of expertise is in public interest communication and creative brand development for food and beverage producers. Alex recently returned to his childhood home in Woodbury, where he lives with his wife and two children. By reconnecting to his roots and Vermont’s natural landscape, Alex is committed to stewarding this land for the next generation.

Apart from our generous landowners, we have received support from the Woodbury, Green Mountain, and Craftsbury Community Funds. We partner with the Vermont Land Trust. But mainly we rely on funds raised from residents and friends of the towns we serve. In 2019, 121 households donated a total of \$11,930. 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, VT 05843**.

## NRLT Board of Trustees

Jack Travelstead, Woodbury, chair  
 Steve Young, Wolcott, co-vice-chair  
 Susan Houston, Craftsbury, co-vice-chair  
 Cate Garvey, Wolcott, secretary;  
 Diana Peduzzi, Woodbury, treasurer  
 Paul Cillo, Hardwick; John Elwell, Craftsbury;  
 Clive Gray, Greensboro;  
 Laurie Gullion, Craftsbury;  
 Bob Hawk, Walden; Steve Meyer, Hardwick;  
 Ralph Monticello, Eden; Alex Peltz, Woodbury

## NRLT Advisory Committee

Kiley Briggs, Woodbury; Farley Brown, Craftsbury;  
 Judy Davis, Craftsbury; Kyle Gray, Greensboro; David Gross,  
 Hardwick; Ann Ingerson, Craftsbury; Bruce Lindwall,  
 Craftsbury; Jennifer Lucas, Greensboro; David McMath,  
 Walden; Kristina Michelsen, Hardwick; Susan Sawyer,  
 Woodbury; Liz Chehayl, Albany

## NRLT conservation easements

(listed by date of closing)

Landowner	Date	Town	Acres conserved
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
June Cook	Dec. 2018	Craftsbury	94
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>774</b>

\*First conserved with Greensboro Land Trust, easement transferred to NRLT in 2008.

# SOME NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF BEAR SWAMP

Steve Young, 2019

When I first knew Bear Swamp, in the late 1940s, the upper—eastern—part was a sort of secret fishing spot for a few people: especially Glen Fisk and Ken Palmer (according to his daughter, Sara Shevenell). The western portion was actually a hayfield, attached to the Jule Ellsworth farm and reached by a ford across Tamarack Brook. At that time beavers were still rare in our area, so beaver dams didn't inundate the hayfield, and the upper area was a dense alder swamp, hard for a ten-year-old to navigate. It was still possible to find traces of a corduroy winter road that had once been used to bring logs to a sawmill located just upstream from the Tamarack Brook crossing of Town Hill Road. There were also stories about the swamp being cut over during World War I to provide leaf oil used in the making of explosives. It was possible to find an occasional fence post and barbed wire along a property line immediately north of the brook, but I doubt that many cattle ever went down to the swampy areas; they could easily have gotten mired in the deep peat.



Bear Swamp, May 2020—drone shot by Kyle Gray

In the 1950s, the beavers returned. Their dams caused the flooding of the low-lying areas. Trees—mainly tamarack (larch)—died and were left as stubs, and most of the alder also was killed by the rising water. The hayfield was abandoned, and the area began to revert to a wilder, more pristine aspect. At some point, Glen

Fisk acquired a major portion of the swamp tract, about 180 acres; he held it for a decade or more. In the late 1960s, when was 80 or so, Glen approached my father and asked him if he would be interested in buying the tract. The asking price was, I believe, 100 dollars per acre—not cheap at the time for swampland and more or less inaccessible forest. The Bear Swamp tract adjoined my parents' land, and there had been some ideas floated about harvesting the deep peat deposits known to occur there, and possibly creating an artificial lake by damming and dredging. This seemed to my family to be a bad idea, especially since I had come to realize that the swamp was an exceptional natural area, for a number of reasons which I'll touch upon below. My parents decided that it was worth stretching the budget in order to preserve Bear Swamp.

The acquisition of Bear Swamp was a major impetus for the creation of the Center for Northern Studies. The land had many features of the typical boreal forest environment, which generally occurs a good deal farther north, well up into Canada. There were, for example, lowland stands of black spruce and Labrador tea, and breeding populations of boreal chickadees and three-toed woodpeckers (the moose had yet to arrive.) My parents made the gift of an additional ten-acre tract near the road, on which we could build a field station, and the Center for Northern Studies was launched in 1971.

At that time, there was a major portion of the swamp that was owned by another private party. Bob Klein, of The Nature Conservancy (TNC), knew the owner and was able to convince him to donate a 125-acre tract to TNC. My family then donated their portion of the swamp to TNC, who then deeded the entire 300+ acre tract to the Center for Northern Studies, first putting restrictions in the deed that the land must be used for educational purposes.

For the next forty or more years, Bear Swamp was a major feature of the Center for Northern Studies. We made a variety of interesting discoveries. For example, what was now peatland had once, after the glaciers left about 14,000 years ago, been a deep, narrow lake, filling much of the valley. The lake actually still exists: the peatlands and forest form a skim over a body of water which we know is at least 60 feet deep. We discovered and documented the breeding sites and behavior of several boreal vertebrate species, and we made significant discoveries of the activities of northern mammals in winter, under deep snow cover. All this resulted in an array of scientific publications, student senior theses, and the buildup of a body of knowledge regarding the environment of Bear Swamp in all seasons of the year, and over an extended period of time.