



November
2023

SHARON LAND TRUST

Looking for Rare Treasures in our Midst

Our corner of Connecticut is home to many rare and threatened plant species. This is due, in part, to our unique habitats: Benton Hill fen—part of the Sharon Land Trust's Benton Hill Preserve—is one local example. It is a highly unusual wetland area underlain by limestone, which creates an alkaline base for many rare plants. It has been the subject of conservation and research efforts since the 1980's, and this year the Benton Hill Preserve has been the focus of two such projects, one led by the Native Plant Trust to study the hairy wood mint, and the other led by Max McCarthy, a PhD student from Rutgers University, who is studying the rare *Parnassia* mining bee.



Hairy wood mint, © Native Plant Society

Searching for the elusive hairy wood mint

On a warm day in August, Robin Zitter and Becky Hardy, volunteers with the nonprofit Native Plant Trust, trekked into the Benton Hill Preserve to search for the hairy wood mint, *Blephilia hirsuta* var *hirsuta*. The state of Connecticut, along with the Native Plant Trust, has kept careful records of populations of this rare plant, tracking their location, size and vigor. Plant conservation volunteers are trained amateur field botanists who monitor, identify threats, and address management needs for endangered plants. Seeds are collected for growing new plants to repopulate and enhance an existing community. Using data from previous surveys, Robin and Becky tromped through thorns and mud to the site where the *Blephilia* had previously been found. It was a tangle of barberry, multiflora rose and bittersweet. Unfortunately, Robin and Becky surmised that the population of *Blephilia* had succumbed to aggressive invasive plants, crowded out and starved for resources. This is too often the case, as

development and disturbance tips the balance of native plant communities. This data is important to the Land Trust as it will guide our future stewardship efforts, helping us to formulate a plan for controlling invasive plant species and restoring these habitats to their full ecological potential.

Studying population connectivity of a rare wild bee

Wild bees are important pollinators of crops and natural plant communities, but populations of some species are in steep decline, likely due to the destruction and fragmentation of habitat. The *Parnassia* mining bee, *Andrena parnassiae*, is a rare wild bee species that is found in alkaline wetland fens, like those in our Benton Hill Preserve. These rare bees are most active in August and September when they visit the flowers of the grass of *Parnassus*, the only plant from which female bees collect pollen to create nests for their offspring. As a result of this specialization, the

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A Note from the President

I want to thank our many members for your support. 2023 has been a good year for the Sharon Land Trust, with new acquisitions and stewardship goals that you'll read about on these pages. We are grateful to have been able to do so much, thanks to generous donations — of every size — from our community.

But there is much more to do. I think we have all noticed that our beloved corner of Connecticut has been discovered. Perhaps you, like me, have been surprised by how many new houses are springing up on wooded lots and open fields. The development of Sharon's unprotected farmland may happen ever more quickly in 2024 and beyond. The increased pressure on our open spaces makes the Land Trust's work urgent. Please continue to support the Trust as we work to preserve the rural character of Sharon.

Our part-time Executive Director, Maria Grace, has taken a well-deserved full-time position with the Northwest Connecticut Land Conservancy. I want to thank Maria for her service and great work over the past six years. It has been a pleasure to work together with her, and we all wish her the best! Tim Hunter, our fantastic Director of Stewardship, has graciously stepped in to manage the office until we find a new ED. Any interested candidates, please send your resume to: info@sharonlandtrust.org

With thanks again, and all best,



Jennifer Dillon



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location and distribution of these bees is predictable—but highly fragmented, since these habitats are rare and isolated. Max McCarthy has been studying populations of the Parnassia mining bee throughout the northeastern United States in the hopes of learning how this isolation is affecting the bees' genetic diversity. Max visited the Benton Hill Preserve in late August to conduct his research, and while he didn't find bees on this visit, as he puts it: "Even recording where bees do *not* occur is interesting information that might help eventually give us a better understanding of their needs." We are grateful that by preserving our local ecosystems, the Sharon Land Trust can contribute both to studying and to safeguarding rare and vanishing species for generations to come.

The Beauty of Conservation Easements

In December 2022, Rachael Combe and Orlando Knauss protected their 49-acre property on Keeler Road through a conservation easement. “We have four children who have grown up on this land,” Rachael explains, “and my parents and brother also live in Sharon. To us, Sharon equals love for the family, friends, animals, and plants that inhabit it. We wanted to preserve our slice of the natural world for future generations of all these living things. When we looked into protecting our land through the Sharon Land Trust, it was a no-brainer from a moral, emotional, and financial perspective. The Land Trust made the process simple and even fun, helping us and our children to learn about the ecosystem of our land. We’re grateful to be part of it!”

Conservation easements are the best tool for protecting privately owned land. A voluntary legal agreement that permanently limits the use of the land, conservation easements limit the type and scope of development, so that the land’s natural beauty and ecological values can be preserved. The landowner and Land Trust work together to decide on the terms that are right for the land *and* for the people who live there—so the landowner can continue to farm the land or build a home, for example. A conservation easement is beneficial to a landowner because it...

- allows the landowner to retain ownership of the property;
- allows continued use of the land;
- allows the selling of the land or transfer of ownership to heirs;
- is permanent but flexible—it can be tailored to meet specific needs and protect a wide variety of conservation values on the land, including agricultural, forestry, scenic, historic, and/or wildlife habitat;
- may allow the landowner to claim an income tax deduction and estate tax benefits.

As you drive through Sharon , you see the benefits of conservation easements firsthand, since the Land Trust holds 54 of them, totaling more than 2,008 acres. Neighbors and community members past and present understood the need to protect our area from development pressure, and maintain our lands for the benefit of nature and community. If you are interested in learning more about conservation easements, please contact our office.



SHARON LAND TRUST MEMBERSHIP
January 1, 2023 to November 1, 2023

\$5,000+

Anonymous
 Fa & Roger Liddell
 Christopher & Annette Clow
 Purdy & Joshua Eaton
 Lynden & Leigh Miller
 Kate Flynn
 Matthew & Jessica Harris

Chinkapin Oak \$1,000+

Meredith & Conley Rollins
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Chinkapin Oak \$1,000+ continued...

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 Kelly Hughes
 Leigh Larmoyeux
 Michael Levengood
 George Mason
 Virginia Norris
 Anita Tiburzi-Johnson

Red Cedar \$100+

Anonymous
 Bolus Pools LLC
 Derek Farrar
 Isabel Sloane & Drew Robbins
 Kristina Durr & J. Barclay Collins
 James & Michele Jeffery
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 Laurel Pinson & Joel Weber
 Leslie Gottlieb
 Maja Clark
 Margaret Mueller
 Scott & Karen Dillman
 Sharon Lawn & Landscape LLC
 Stephanie & Noah Perlman
 Steven & Katherine Soll
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 Patricia & Thomas Barry
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Robin Fasano
 Gabriele Caroti & Alice McKown
 Jean & Peter Anderson
 Moore & More Printing
 Kelly & Greg Kilmer
 Margaret DeMarrais
 Peter & Christine Birnbaum
 Sallie Ketcham
 Chris Abeel & Libby Hall-Abeel
 William Arnold
 Stephen & Nancy Bennett
 Jenny & Barry Brown
 Mark Bunnell
 Felix & Jeanmarie Bustillo
 Claudia Cayne
 Kenneth & Domanie Daniel
 Francesca Digirolamo
 Roger Elwood
 Thomas Gibb & Robert Lindgren
 Carol Gourley
 Harold Gurnee
 John & Patee Hecht
 Kim Hohlfeld
 Steven & Elysa Levy
 Roger Lourie
 David Marshall

SHARON LAND TRUST MEMBERSHIP
January 1, 2023 to November 1, 2023

Red Cedar \$100+ continued...

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 Brooke & Richard Rapaport
 Perry Tymeson
 Susan Vantongerren
 Paul Wachtel
 Barbara & Marc Weiss
 Stephen Wermiel & Rhonda Schwartz
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 Lillian Woodworth
 Lindley & Allen Young

\$0 to \$99

Anonymous
 Timothy & Christina Hunter
 Kathleen & Robert Kulig
 Eric Rosen
 Stanley MacMillian
 Eliza Klose & Harding Bancroft
 Blake & Cagney Morrison
 Betsy Hall
 Liza & Greg Reiss

\$0 to \$99 continued...

Marel Rogers
 Michael Clemente
 Coleen Kopec
 Tina & Rusty Chandler
 Sara Cousins & Pierce Kearney
 William Godsman
 Randi Kish
 Barbara McCollum
 Brian Anderson & Camilla Fallon
 Carole Colpitts
 Joy Rochford
 Divya Symmers
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 James Silvia
 Karin & James Wexler
 Karolene & Clay Carlson
 Kathryn Coe
 Laurie Nussdorfer
 Liane Montesa & Herb Dershowitz
 Lynn Kearcher & Carl Chaiet
 Michael Deutsch
 Joel and Terry Meisel
 Aita & Norman Askinazi
 Siegrun Hohlfeld
 Susan Irwin
 The Walton Fishing Club
 Walter & Joan Yahn

\$0 to \$99 continued...

Warren Holman
 William Cord
 William Voldstad
 Bob & Sandy Haiko
 Donn Castonguay
 Edmund & Leila Mander
 George & Istar Mudge
 Jennifer Smith
 Michelle Booth
 Tom Zetterstrom
 Christal Fredlund Preszler
 William Whelan

In memory of Ed Midgley
 Laura P. Midgley
In memory of Rose Metzger
 Albert & Jane Metzger
In memory of Kyle Whelan
 Anonymous
In memory of Emma and Morris Paley
 Paley's Farm Market
In memory of Bruce MacFarlane
 Marel Rogers

Happily Serving Our Local Youth!

Sharon Land Trust believes deeply in helping young people pursue their passion for the environment. So in that spirit, we have created programs for area youth that connect them with the natural world and encourage them to follow conservation minded career paths.

SCHOLARSHIPS: The Land Trust awarded scholarships to 2023 Housatonic Valley Regional High School graduate Sylvie Stiffler and to 2023 Berkshire School graduate Emma Colley. The scholarships are given to students with exceptional academic performance and leadership who plan to study natural, biological, or environmental studies at a college or university.

Sylvie is the Valedictorian for the class of 2023 at Housatonic Valley Regional High School. She was a leader in the planning and execution of the Troutbeck Symposium, bringing area schools together to explore local history that had been marginalized. Sylvie will attend Colorado College and plans to major in Environmental Studies. She hopes to become an environmental attorney or policy advocate.

Emma graduated from The Berkshire School, where she took an advanced placement Environmental Science Research class that studied microplastics, their effect on the environment, and ways to remove them from bodies of water. Emma will attend the University of Richmond and plans to pursue a degree in Biology that will lead to studies in sustainability and conservation.

Both students live in Sharon, CT. Sylvie and Emma are deeply committed to our community and the natural world. We look forward to following them on their educational journey!



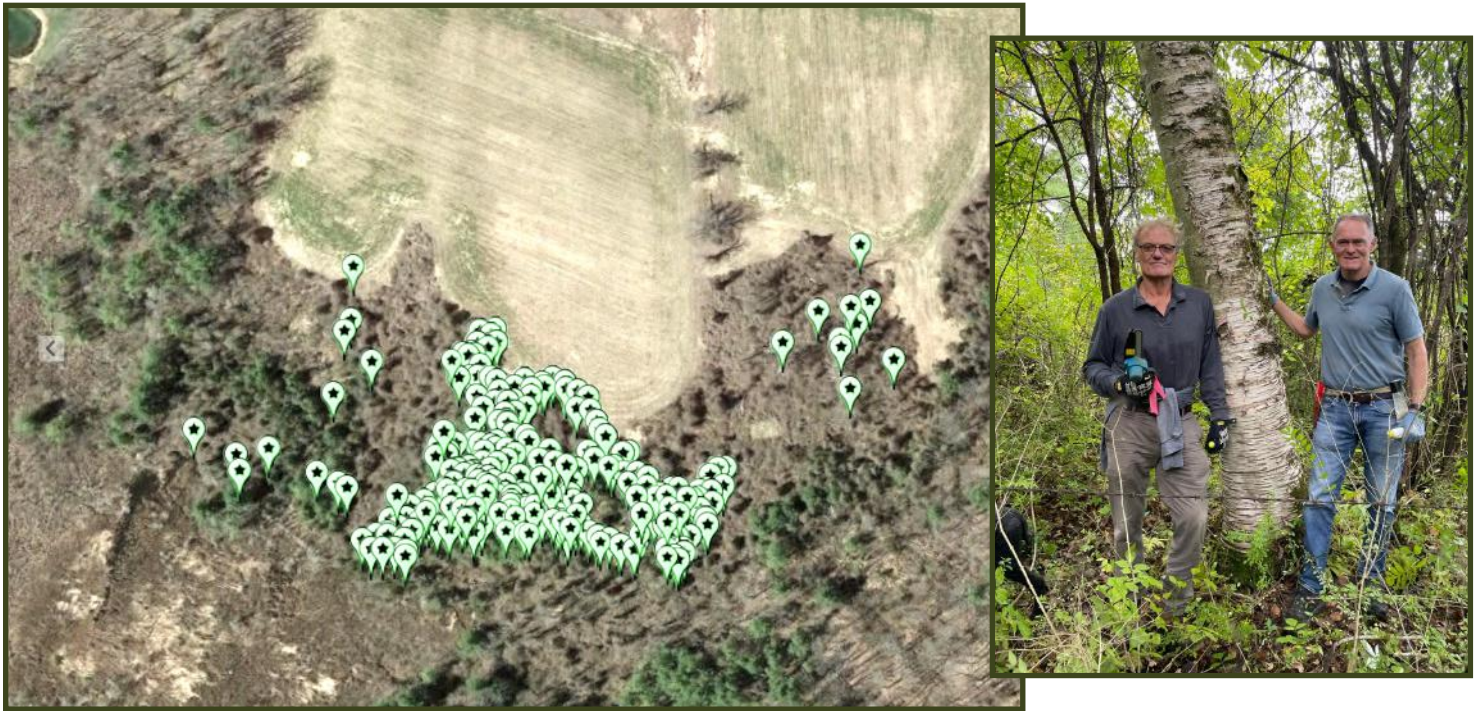
Student Work Project participants at the start of a day of work at the VonAhn preserve © Maria Grace

STUDENT WORK PROJECT: Since 2016, the Trust has offered a two-week student work project, allowing the youth of Sharon an opportunity to help out on habitat and wildlife enhancement projects as well as trail building and maintenance. Students receive a stipend for their time and work. This summer, eight teens participated in the project, the most kids the Trust has recruited for this program to date!

The students were tasked with improving the trail system at the Trust's Goodbody and VonAhn Preserves. They hiked almost 16 miles and climbed more than 3,400 feet, carrying 110 pounds of tools. They cut, picked, pried, hauled, planted, and set 1.8 tons of dirt and 4 tons of rocks, ensuring that

the Trust's trails are safe and accessible to the community. Most of all, they learned about land conservation, management, and stewardship, including the identification and control of invasive plants and habitat improvement. Being able to support the next generation of local conservationists is core to the mission of the Land Trust; we are thrilled to be building their connection to our environment both now and in the future.

Progress Report: Invasive Plants at Hamlin



Left: A map showcasing the location of all the trees that have been saved by invasive vines. Right: Martin Baltus and Allen Reiser, SLT Volunteers, pose with a liberated white birch tree at the Hamlin preserve. © Tom Zetterstrom

One of our stewardship goals is to battle back the overwhelming spread of invasive plant species on our preserves. This year we've been working on a patch of the Hamlin Preserve to control invasive vines that outcompete native vegetation. Especially in places like this, where farm fields meet woods, or along roadsides where the soil has been disturbed or trees cut and cleared, non-native vines flourish. Their uncontrolled spread threatens our forests by climbing and suffocating trees, causing entire stands of trees to fall under their weight. The most predominant invasive at Hamlin is Oriental bittersweet vines. The Land Trust has enlisted volunteers to cut these invasive vines so the 6-acre forest has a chance to save itself before it succumbs to the weight of these strangling vines. It's a long-term project that will have major impacts on the health of the forest ecosystem that hugs the base of Red Mountain. You can see their work if you look across the field to the right of the parking lot at the trailhead.

As of today, volunteers have worked more than 200 hours over 12 work days to eradicate invasives in Hamlin's "disenchanted forest." We've rescued more than 100 trees across more than 1.5 acres. The tree species saved include red cedar, Eastern white pine, white birch, apple, American basswood, and sugar maples.

**Stay up to date and engaged by subscribing to our email newsletter
and following us on social media!**

It's the best way to stay connected and learn more about our work!



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[@SharonLandTrust](https://www.instagram.com/SharonLandTrust)

PROTECTED! 80 Acres on Indian Mountain



A view of the interior forest of SLT's newly protected land on Millerton Road. © Tim Hunter

The Sharon Land Trust is excited to announce the protection of an additional 81 acres on Millerton Road! This steep, forested property on the western side of Indian Mountain is adjacent to both the Goodbody and VonAhn Preserves, creating a contiguous patch of land of more than 600 acres. This project was funded by the CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) Open Space and Watershed Acquisitions (OSWA) grants program, as well as federal US Fish and Wildlife Service Highlands grants and generous private donations.

Nearly three years ago, former owner Lionel Goldfrank approached the Land Trust with interest in preserving this land. With its adjacencies to other protected lands and its location along the western ridge of Indian Mountain, it was easy to make the case for protection—but the funding to buy the property would take time to assemble. The Trust relies on grants from the state and federal government—as well as private funding from area residents—to support land protection. Patience on the part of the seller is always required. Luckily, Lionel was willing to wait, and the Trust worked diligently to find the funds to protect this property in perpetuity. Because public funding was used to protect this land, it is now open to everyone who wants to use it for respite and recreation. Equally important, it will be a refuge for the vast range of wildlife that calls this area home. We couldn't be happier!



The Sharon Land Trust is proud to be an **ACCREDITED LAND TRUST BY THE LAND TRUST ALLIANCE**. The accreditation seal is a mark of distinction, showing that Sharon Land Trust meets the highest national standards for excellence and conservation permanence. Sharon Land Trust joins more than 1,200 land trusts across the United States that have gone through rigorous third party reviews of policies and procedures that streamline operations and lead to more effective land conservation. **Learn more at www.landtrustaccreditation.org**