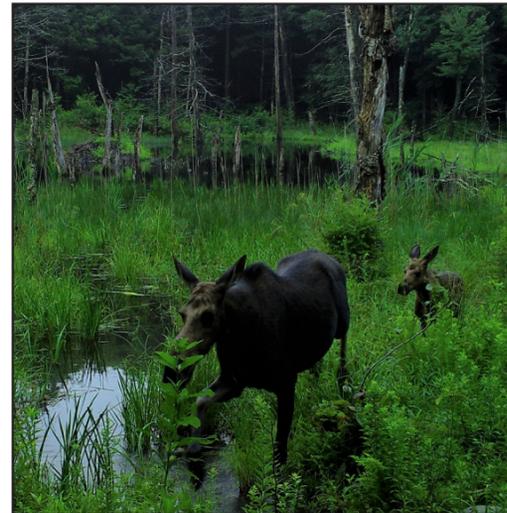




ASHFIELD CHESTER CHESTERFIELD CONWAY CUMMINGTON
GOSHEN HUNTINGTON MIDDLEFIELD PLAINFIELD
WESTHAMPTON WILLIAMSBURG WINDSOR WORTHINGTON

Wildlife of The Hilltowns

Last fall, HLT purchased our first wildlife camera. Over the past year, we have been placing it on some of our conserved properties throughout The Hilltowns to document the wildlife supported by this habitat. We have gotten expert assistance in camera placement as well as some additional cameras to capture critters from our colleagues Sally Naser, Julie Richburg, and Michael Madole of The Trustees. We wanted to share a few of our favorites images with you here!



Help Choose the Winners of the Fall Photo Contest

Our Fall Photo Contest—*The Amazing Life of Individual Trees*—recently concluded and the pictures are available for viewing on our website. Voting will begin soon both on our website and Facebook.

Please go view the beautiful submissions and vote for your favorites! Early next year, we will host a reception and celebration at the Bullitt Reservation where you can view the images in person and meet the photographers—stay tuned to our website and Facebook for details.



Photo by Stephen Buckley, from 2016 Photo Contest

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Public Spaces Through Partnerships



At the Big View trailhead. From left, HLT Executive Director Sally Loomis, Robin Merritt, Diane Merritt, Philip Merritt, and Melissa Patterson of FLT

Land conservation is the core of Hilltown Land Trust’s mission, and most people who support conservation already have a deep connection to the outdoors. That is

People need spaces where they can explore the natural world on their own or with a guide.

why much of HLT’s work involves helping people have meaningful experiences that strengthen their relationship with the natural world. People need spaces where they can explore the natural world on their own or with a guide. Often the most effective way to create these places is through partnerships.

When HLT was approached by our local partner Franklin Land Trust (FLT) last year about working together to increase public access on privately-held land in the area, we were eager to get involved. Through this partnership, and thanks to landowners Philip and Diane Merritt, the popular Big View Trail in Williamsburg, with its spectacular views of the Pioneer Valley and Mt. Tom Range, is now a protected, public hiking trail.

“Partnering with Hilltown Land Trust and Franklin Land Trust on this project means more people will get to know these woods and special views that our family has had the privilege of enjoying for years”

The new public access easement on the Merritt land is part of the Voluntary Public Access (VPA) Program, which encourages landowners to open their land to the public for recreation through temporary or permanent easements.

continued next column

Public Spaces Through Partnerships, continued

The VPA Program is funded through the USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service, and is being implemented by FLT in partnership with the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, Massachusetts Forest Alliance, and HLT, among others.

"We love the idea of sharing our trail with the public through the VPA Program. Partnering with Hilltown Land Trust and Franklin Land Trust on this project means more people will get to know these woods and special views that our family has had the privilege of enjoying for years," said Diane Merritt.

HLT is always looking for different ways to facilitate connections between people and nature, and to assist landowners in taking care of their land.

The Big View Trail connects with a trail on abutting land conserved as part of another partnership being led by HLT: the Brewer Brook Conservation Project. This collaborative conservation effort, slated to be completed by the end of January 2019, will bring together 7 property owners, 4 towns, 2 land trusts, and 1 state agency to conserve nearly 1,000 acres of connected land in Westhampton, Chesterfield, Williamsburg, and Northampton.

HLT is always looking for different ways to facilitate connections between people and nature, and to assist landowners in taking care of their land. The VPA Program accomplishes both of these goals. Through local partnerships like these, HLT helps make and keep open spaces in The Hilltowns available to the public.

Get to Know Our 2018-19 TerraCorps Members!

Each year, we have the pleasure of welcoming new TerraCorps-AmeriCorps members who serve with us from September through July. They perform crucial work for our organization: monitoring and managing conservation lands, training and working with volunteers, organizing and running public events, and so much more. Read about this year's Community Engagement Coordinator Susan Schroder and Land Stewardship Coordinator Brigid Ryan in this interview, then meet them in person at an upcoming event or volunteer opportunity!

What are your earliest memories of being introduced to the environment?

SUSAN: My father had loved the land and had gotten his graduate degree in agriculture and chemistry. It was important to him to bring his children into the woods and learn about the land. We spent a lot of time in the Poconos where my cousins had several cabins and there was a two-seater outhouse with giant spiders that scared me half to death!



Susan installs a temporary bridge she built for a recent public hike

BRIGID: As a kid I would spend weekends and summers in an old hunting cabin in Chesterfield where my mom would take us on hikes to the brook and through the woods. We would travel from Springfield to the Hilltowns with my cousins and spend days exploring the woods and the nights warmed by the campfire.



Trail maintenance will play a big role in Brigid's service year

What is your interest in land conservation?

SUSAN: I have a great appreciation for other species and it is a great privilege for me to be able to spend my time advocating to ensure that we continue to have a diversely populated world that includes the natural environment whether it be farmland or woodland.

BRIGID: I realized halfway through college that I could earn a degree and have a career involving conservation. I was eager to make it possible so that I could spend my days doing something that I loved which involved being outside, helping the environment, and helping others understand the environment.

So far, what is your favorite part about serving as a TerraCorps member for HLT?

SUSAN: My favorite part is creating successful events and being around a lot of happy woodland hikers and experiencing wonderful discoveries in the natural world.

BRIGID: I've been doing a lot of monitoring on properties this fall so I've loved visiting all of these different places, meeting landowners and working with the volunteers. Everyone has a different eye for things in the woods. I've listened to historical stories from landowners about their land and had volunteers give me great ecology lessons.

HLT is Growing!

Expanding HLT's staff to strengthen our ability to conserve land in The Hilltowns has been a goal for years. Since 2010, HLT has been staffed by a part-time Executive Director with the support of AmeriCorps members serving a year at a time. Early this fall, we added a second staff member to our team: Katie Carr, HLT's new Development and Communications Coordinator.

Katie served HLT for two years as our TerraCorps-AmeriCorps Community Engagement Coordinator, and we are very happy to have her back as a permanent staff member. In this new position, she will be responsible for fundraising and development, as well as managing our website, electronic and print newsletters, and social media accounts. Katie brings extensive communications experience and exceptional organizational skills to HLT and already knows the organization well. Welcome Katie!



Katie at the Bullitt Reservation

Where do you live now and what is your favorite part about living there?

SUSAN: I've lived in the woods in Conway for 46 years. I love the central experience of being in the natural world, the smell of the leaves and the beautiful stars at night and the colors of green.

BRIGID: I've lived in Chesterfield for 10 years with my family. My favorite part about living there is being able to take my dogs for a walk to my grandparents' house a mile through the woods.

UMass Students Take Advantage of Experiential Learning with HLT

This past October, our Land Stewardship Coordinator Brigid trained student volunteers from the University of Massachusetts-Amherst in property monitoring, tool safety, and how to use apps to collect data in the field. These students are enrolled in conservation courses with professors who encourage them to volunteer for local environmental organizations as part of the curriculum.

For two consecutive weekends, Brigid and a group of five volunteers from Professor Lena Fletcher's undergraduate "Environment and Society" course improved the trails at HLT's Bradley and Breckenridge properties in Williamsburg.



UMass volunteers take a break from trail maintenance to pose for a picture

"I learned a lot about something I could do with my degree after graduating and I got to go hiking for the day."



Brigid reconnected with a few volunteers at the recent RCP Gathering at UMass

They spent their time removing encroaching vegetation, improving drainage, and re-blazing most of the trails.

Student Harry Harmon said his group chose to work with HLT because "we all love hiking and wanted to work outside improving a trail for other hikers."

Brigid also worked with four graduate and undergraduate volunteers from Professor Paul Catanzaro's "Landscape Partnership" course. She trained the students to use the Fulcrum and MotionX apps, which aid in property monitoring through data collection. The students then helped monitor and mark boundaries at properties conserved by HLT.

Lauren Musshorn, who assisted Brigid on monitoring visits to HLT's Pardoe and Birrell properties, said "I learned a lot about something I could do with my degree after graduating and I got to go hiking for the day."

As a recent graduate of UMass-Amherst, and as a former student of both Professors Fletcher and Catanzaro, Brigid was happy to facilitate positive outdoor experiences for these students. HLT is so grateful to be the recipient of the knowledge and energy of these young people and we look forward to continuing to work with UMass-Amherst on projects like this in the future!

To view a video that Professor Fletcher's students produced to document their project, visit our website: www.hilltown-land-trust.org/announcements.