



**Hilltown
Land Trust**
AN AFFILIATE OF THE TRUSTEES

NEWS
**Spring/Summer
2021**

DEDICATED TO PROTECTING THE
WORKING LANDS, NATIVE HABITATS, AND RURAL BEAUTY
OF THE HILLTOWNS SINCE 1986

56 Acres & Public Trail Conserved!



*Landowner Sandy Warren (left) meeting with
HLT Executive Director Sally Loomis in early 2020*

**Capturing
Creatures
in the Wild**

**Meet Nellie
Wilson, Vernal
Pool Protector!**



Locke's Loop trail has been maintained for years by the landowners and HLT's partners at Williamsburg Woodland Trails

56 Acres & Public Trail Conserved!

This spring, Hilltown Land Trust protected 56 acres of important wildlife habitat and recreational space in Williamsburg, thanks in part to a generous donation by landowner Sandra Warren and her late husband Jim Locke.

The property is protected with a conservation restriction, and includes areas identified as important habitat for rare species by the state Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program. Abutting the Petticoat Hill Reservation, the newly conserved land creates a continuous block of over 100 acres of protected habitat—the type of uninterrupted wildlife corridor vital to the survival of rare and native species.

It also lies within a larger 6,000-acre block of undeveloped forest land—one of the last unbroken forests in the Commonwealth—only 1/3 of which is conserved. In the coming years, HLT hopes to work with partners to conserve more land in this area, which has been identified as among the top 10% of forestlands to protect in Massachusetts.

“I am happy to have worked with Hilltown Land Trust to ensure future generations will be able to enjoy this beautiful land.”

— Sandra Warren

The conservation restriction also formalizes public access to a popular local hiking trail known as Locke's Loop. Connecting to a network of trails on Petticoat Hill Reservation (a property of our affiliate The Trustees), the trail is accessible to the public for hiking, cross-country skiing, horseback riding, and other non-motorized activities.

HLT worked closely with property owner Sandra Warren to conserve this place which she and her husband Jim Locke held dear.

“Jim truly loved this land and enjoyed opening up its trails for public use. Knowing

that it will be protected forever for public access would bring him great satisfaction” Warren says. “I am happy to have worked with Hilltown Land Trust to ensure future generations will be able to enjoy this beautiful land.”

**Read the full versions of these articles
and more on our website:
HilltownLandTrust.org/announcements**

Capturing Creatures in the Wild

In early March, over 160 people from across the country (and beyond!) joined Hilltown Land Trust's two-part webinar series "Capturing Creatures: A Wildlife Camera and Nature Sketching Workshop" with wildlife camera specialist Sally Naser and artist Elizabeth Whelan.

This record-breaking attendance was undoubtedly aided by a recent article in *The New York Times* featuring Naser, as well as her large social media following.

Naser started camera trapping when she and her employer, The Trustees, received a grant from the Norcross Wildlife Foundation to build deeper connections with landowners by showing them wildlife that used their land.

Naser found that many people were unaware of how many wild animals lived near their homes. By showing them photos taken on their property, she demonstrated the value of conservation and helped them understand why previous landowners had protected the land.



Barred owl hunting by a vernal pool

In addition to landowners, Sally hopes to reach more people through social media. Using images from over forty cameras placed on conserved land across Massachusetts, Naser educates her nearly 22,000 followers about the species that live here.

"When the pandemic first hit, I heard from a nurse working in a COVID unit who said my Facebook posts helped her unwind at the end of the day," Naser said. "It was incredibly rewarding to know that

my work could provide that support for someone."

In addition to sharing exceptionally cute pictures of Massachusetts megafauna, Naser also hopes to show that we need to find a way to co-exist with, rather than fight against, the natural world.

"If I can move someone from cursing beavers to realizing just how much they do to support all the wildlife in our area, I feel like I have accomplished my goals," Naser said.

If you decide to take up camera trapping, let Naser know.

"I would love to hear from your readers what they are getting on their trail cams! Photos and video from wildlife cameras IS reality, unlike so-called 'reality' TV, and way more entertaining."

Visit our website to read the whole article, view more photos and video, get links to Naser's social media, and learn more about setting up your own camera.



This mating bobcat pair is one of Naser's favorite images she has captured

Meet Nellie Wilson, Vernal Pool Protector!

Nellie Wilson has been volunteering with Hilltown Land Trust for the past two years as the Chesterfield Vernal Pool Representative in our Vernal Pool Plunge program, which seeks to protect these unique water bodies throughout our service area and that of our partners at Wild & Scenic Westfield River Committee. HLT TerraCorps member Barry interviewed Nellie to learn more about why she cares about protecting these vital habitats.

Barry: What are vernal pools?

Nellie: Vernal pools are ephemeral bodies of water without flowing water entering or exiting them. They fill up with rainwater, sleet, and snow melt, and periodically dry out completely. They are free from fish populations, so they are safer habitats for a number of species.

B: What do you do when you visit at a vernal pool?

N: We collect data on the species present and the condition of the pools to submit to the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program. It's very exciting to be doing citizen science - feeling like you can make a difference collecting this data and connecting with landowners so that their pools can be protected.

B: What is certification and why is it important?

N: Vernal pools support species that live and reproduce exclusively in these environments. Certification protects the pool and a surrounding 100 foot radius from development. In the state of Massachusetts there aren't built in legal protections for vernal pools, so it is important that these spaces be certified to preserve and protect them.

B: How can people get involved in protecting vernal pools?

N: If you think you might have a vernal pool on your property, contact the folks at Hilltown Land Trust. And I'm always happy to have people come out in the field with me to look at pools together!

B: Before we go - what's your favorite vernal pool critter?

N: Definitely fairy shrimp! There is something kind of miraculous about these little crustaceans - these weird, tiny things that only exist inside vernal pools. They're pretty special creatures.

Thank you to Nellie Wilson and to all of our volunteers! For more information on how you can help protect vernal pools, and to read a longer version of this interview, visit [HilltownLandTrust.org/vernal-pool-plunge](https://hilltownlandtrust.org/vernal-pool-plunge).



Wilson inspecting a vernal pool

“It’s very exciting to be doing citizen science - feeling like you can make a difference collecting this data and connecting with landowners.”

— Nellie Wilson

Volunteers make your local land trust stronger!

If you are interested in volunteering with HLT, email contactus@hilltownlandtrust.org, or call (413) 628-4485, ext. 5

An Enduring Legacy

By a Hilltown Resident

As a kid, I spent my summers hiking and camping in the mountains near my home with my family, and I have continued exploring wildernesses and mountains ever since. Being outside in the natural world feeds my soul and enriches my life.

When I moved to Western Massachusetts for work, I quickly fell in love with the many wonderful public recreation areas. I feel very fortunate to have lived in the Hilltowns for the past 30 years.

In 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, I saw with new eyes the value of conserved natural spaces: for socializing, getting outside of the house and moving, and gaining perspective.

I believe that I owe it to my town to help conserve the beautiful outdoor spaces that make this a special place to live. And I know supporting a local organization is the best way to make a difference on a local scale. This is why I chose to make Hilltown Land Trust a beneficiary of my life insurance policy.

As someone who doesn't have a lot of accumulated wealth, this was a convenient and easy way for me to save money while supporting an organization doing work that is personally meaningful to me and improves my community.

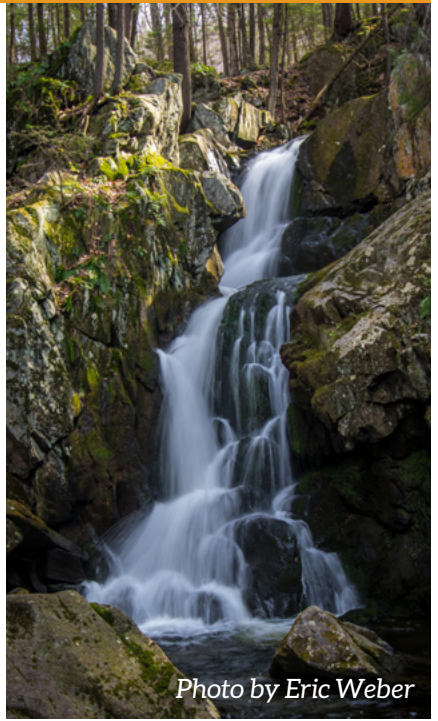


Photo by Eric Weber

“When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, I saw with new eyes the value of conserved natural spaces: for socializing, getting outside of the house and moving, and gaining perspective.”

Donors like this, who include HLT in their plans, ensure a healthy future for the Hilltowns.

If you have made a gift to Hilltown Land Trust through your will or estate plan, even if you wish for the gift to remain anonymous, please let us know so we can thank you too! **Contact Katie Carr, our Development and Communications Coordinator: katie@HilltownLandTrust.org / (413) 628-4485, ext. 5.**

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Tamarack, or American Larch, is the only native deciduous conifer in the Northeast—in the late fall, their green needles turn a showy yellow before dropping to the ground. In the springtime, look for their red-maroon cones (as pictured) in bogs, where these trees tend to grow.

Have you visited one of our trails lately?
We want to hear about your experience! Send us an email:
ContactUs@HilltownLandTrust.org

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