



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

NEWS  
**Spring/Summer  
2023**

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

# Newly Conserved Riverfront Land



**Cold Weather  
and Community**

**Celebrating  
Our Volunteers**

**...and much more!**

[HilltownLandTrust.org](https://HilltownLandTrust.org)



# Conserved Riverfront Land Protects Forests, Waterways, and Habitat

Earlier this year Hilltown Land Trust completed conservation of twenty acres of forested land along the West Branch of the Mill River in Williamsburg.

Protecting land around waterways is crucial to the health of the river, since the land acts as a buffer against erosion, pollution, and floods. Conserving this land helps maintain adequate tree and plant cover for the species that live and breed in the stream habitat.

This property includes 1,400 feet of river frontage in a scenic section of the river upstream from Devil's Den. It includes important habitat for native species, including the Northern Spring Salamander and a dragonfly species called the Ocellated Darner, a species of special concern in Massachusetts.

**Conserving forestland in this area is one way to make a critical contribution to combating climate change.**

from the river. A storm in 2019 caused massive runoff from the project site that damaged forests and polluted the Mill River.

According to the 2022 Climate Change Assessment produced by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the risk of damage caused by flooding and erosion in The Hilltowns will increase significantly over the course of this century. Conserving forestland in this area is one way to make a critical contribution to combating climate change.



*Northern Spring Salamander*  
by Tom Murray



*Ocellated Darner*  
by Tom Murray

The conserved land is land-locked—meaning it has no road frontage—and is designated “forever wild,” creating a place where the forest can mature naturally, with minimal management, and remain largely undisturbed by human activities.

The project came about after the settlement in 2021 of a lawsuit resulting from a violation of federal stormwater requirements by Dynamic Energy Solutions. The company failed to follow state and federal regulations meant to protect wetlands when they built their solar array uphill

We collaborated on this project with our partners at Kestrel Land Trust, who will hold a conservation restriction on the property while HLT holds the title. Combined, the measures help ensure that the land will be protected for conservation purposes in perpetuity. By joining forces with partner organizations and our members, together we can have a bigger impact on the beautiful landscape in this region.





Sarah (left) with Senior Snowshoe participants this winter

## Cold Weather and Community

By Sarah Welch, Community Engagement Coordinator and TerraCorps-AmeriCorps service member

Every year, Hilltown Land Trust's Community Engagement Coordinator helps publicize and lead the All Out Adventure (AOA) senior snowshoeing programs at the DAR State Forest as part of a long-standing partnership. HLT is happy to support the work of our partners at AOA, who create outdoor experiences for people of all abilities.

On a winter morning in Goshen, a group of seniors is seated around a registration table. The program leaders and I are buzzing back and forth, tying on ice grippers and snowshoes in preparation for trekking snow-covered trails. The seniors are here for the Senior Snowshoe walks, a weekly program that gives seniors a way to stay active and socialize throughout the winter.

**“One of the things I love about the program is that I can go with a group. At my age, I don't have any friends that are physically able to go out with me and do this type of activity.”**

**– Ruth Alice, Participant**

After a brief round of introductions, we are off, tramping across the shore of Upper Highland Lake before heading into the woods on a universal access trail. We trace the lake shore and deep hemlock forests, stopping to notice the differences between yellow, white, and black birch tree bark. Ice fishers dot the surface of the thick lake ice.

One snowshoer and I chat about our rescue cats as other participants around us catch up. These hikes give us good exercise and are also a powerful social tonic. For many seniors in the area, the Senior Snowshoe walks are what gets them moving and meeting people during the winter months.

“One of the things I love about the program is that I can go with a group. At my age, I don't have any friends that are physically able to go out with me and do this type of activity. I wouldn't go alone in case I fell or ran into a problem,” participant Ruth Alice tells me.

Rounding the bend in the snow-covered woods road, we all return to the registration area to remove borrowed snowshoes and set them aside for the next group arriving at noon. Friends and new faces part ways, calling out to each other, “See you next week!”

# Celebrating Our Volunteers

In March, Hilltown Land Trust staff and TerraCorps members held our annual Volunteer Celebration at the Chesterfield General Store.

Volunteers are essential to achieving HLT's mission. From clearing branches off trails, to taking photographs and registering runners and walkers at the Gorge après Gorge, to serving on our Board or committees, volunteers help with all aspects of this work.

HLT was an all-volunteer organization for the first twenty-four years of our existence. Though we have grown to a small staff of three people, assisted by TerraCorps service members, our mighty volunteer base is still the heart of our organization!

For this year's celebration, we were excited to gather inside for the first time since 2020. Brand new volunteers joined others who have been helping HLT for many years, and together we enjoyed delicious snacks and great company.

Our Land Stewardship Coordinator and TerraCorp-AmeriCorps service member Tim even organized a trivia game! Here are a couple sample questions. Do you know the answers?

- Which Massachusetts county has its highest point conserved by HLT?
- What is the most common tree in Massachusetts by total number?

**Learn the answers and read the full versions of all our newsletter articles on our website! Scan the QR code or visit [hilltownlandtrust.org/tag/ss23newsletter](https://hilltownlandtrust.org/tag/ss23newsletter)**



*Volunteers enjoying the trivia game and each other*

**Our mighty volunteer base is still the heart of our organization**



## Join our team!

The Board and Staff of HLT invite you to become more involved with the work of conserving and caring for the land, habitat, and trails in this special place.

There are many ways you can participate, from helping to build and maintain our trails, to making sure our public events run smoothly, to strategic planning, policy setting, and so much more.

We are looking for engaged and motivated community members to serve on committees, give input into our new Strategic Plan, become regular volunteers, or consider serving on our Board of Directors.

Please fill out the form on our website to share with us how you are interested in being involved. **Visit [hilltownlandtrust.org/announcements/want-to-make-a-difference](https://hilltownlandtrust.org/announcements/want-to-make-a-difference) or scan the QR code to the right.**



# Supporting the Places that Matter to Them

Drew Johnson and Angelina Altobellis fell in love with each other around the same time they fell in love with Western Massachusetts. They met attending UMass-Amherst, and after a few moves to other parts of the country, returned to the area to settle down.

They wanted a place that was “quiet, with a friendly, laid-back community and easy access to both the outdoors and Northampton,” and were excited to find their home in Williamsburg near a beaver pond. Angelina said The Hilltowns are “the kind of place that we would want to travel to if we didn’t already live here.”

Both their jobs combine remote time with long commutes for in-person work, and they love the quiet solitude of their home after a long day. They enjoy unwinding with outdoor activities, including on HLT trails near them, like Bradley, Breckenridge, the Big View Trail, Locke’s Loop, and the Historic Dam Trail.

“We appreciate the approach HLT takes to conserving and stewarding the natural spaces around us—combining conservation with access,” said Drew. He continued, “[HLT] has offered really thoughtful educational programs that have helped us better understand the land and ecosystems around us.”

Last year, Drew and Angelina decided to become Sustaining Members of HLT by making a monthly gift.

“So much of what we appreciate about living in Williamsburg benefits from the work of HLT... and it’s important to us to support this financially (however modestly!),” said Angelina. “A sustaining membership makes it easy to make regular gifts to an organization we care about; it’s a great way to build this support into our budget.”



Drew and Angelina in the woods near their home

**“A sustaining membership makes it easy to make regular gifts to an organization we care about; it’s a great way to build this support into our budget.”**

## **Sustaining Members like Drew and Angelina provide a steady stream of support for land protection and stewardship in The Hilltowns.**

You too can show your enduring love for this beautiful landscape with a monthly gift of \$5 or more. Become a Sustaining Member today by scanning the QR code or visit [hilltownlandtrust.org/get-involved/sustaining-membership](https://hilltownlandtrust.org/get-involved/sustaining-membership).



## Hilltown Land Trust Board of Directors & Staff

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# Give Back to the Land Day is on Thursday, April 20th!



Land lovers from across the region and beyond are supporting local land conservation for this year's Give Back to the Land online giving day. Hilltown Land Trust is teaming up again with other regional land trusts to raise money to support the needs of the community for climate change mitigation, carbon capture and storage, water quality, biodiversity of native species, and land access.

We have an ambitious goal of raising \$20,000 to give back to the land that gives so much to all of us. The first \$5,000 in gifts will be matched by a generous gift from our current and former Board members. Will you join us?

**Visit [givebacktotheland.org](https://givebacktotheland.org) to make your gift before midnight on April 20th.**

**Early giving starts Saturday, April 15th.**

**Have you visited one of our trails recently?  
We want to hear about your experience! Send us an email:  
[ContactUs@HilltownLandTrust.org](mailto:ContactUs@HilltownLandTrust.org)**

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