



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

NEWS  
**Fall/Winter  
2023**

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



# Wildlife Corridor Conserved

**Weathering  
Storms**

**Welcoming  
New Arrivals**

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



# Gift of 132 Acres to Connect Habitat, 9+ Miles of Trails

Clary Hill, a recent donation of 132 acres to Hilltown Land Trust, sits at a conservation crossroads. Spread across the towns of Goshen, Conway, and Williamsburg, the parcel connects Briar Hill Conservation Area to the DAR State Forest and beyond. Soon, hikers will be able to enjoy an uninterrupted 9-mile hike from Briar Hill Road to the Bullitt Reservation in Ashfield – and link up with the 19 miles of State Forest trail to boot.

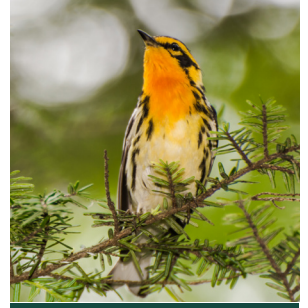
Hikers aren't the only ones who will benefit from increased connectivity. Clary Hill links previously isolated small conservation parcels to a large swath of conserved land, permanently protecting habitat and travel corridors for wildlife.

**"This is a win for people in search of adventures close to home, and for wildlife who need larger areas to roam."**

The hilltop hemlock grove is a summer home to Blackburnian warblers, while berry-filled scat reflects black bears' taste for the raspberries and blackberries that grow prolifically in the property's sunlit early successional forest.

Clary Hill is a generous bequest to Hilltown Land Trust from the Sofinowski family. HLT will have primary stewardship responsibility for the land, and The Trustees will hold a Conservation Restriction on the land. The affiliation between our organizations allows for and streamlines this sort of collaboration, and helps both organizations better meet community needs.

HLT is excited to work with Town Trails Committees and other partners to develop trails, steward wildlife habitat, and care for this land together.



*Male Blackburnian Warbler*

"Connecting large blocks of conserved lands is one of the key features we look for in conservation projects," says HLT Executive Director Sally Loomis. "This is a win for people in search of longer recreational adventures close to home, and for wildlife like moose and bears who need larger areas to roam."

Site visits to Clary Hill have shown us that wildlife is already using a rich mosaic of habitats.



*Previously logged and farmed fields, now vibrant meadow habitat.*

## Major Grant to Double Our Pace of Land Conservation

HLT recently secured a challenge grant to support a new staff member who will help us double the pace of conserving land with notable habitat, climate resilience and recreational values in the Hilltowns. HLT will be launching a campaign to raise funds to match and unlock the grant funds. To learn more about this exciting opportunity, contact Executive Director Sally Loomis:

[sally@hilltownlandtrust.org](mailto:sally@hilltownlandtrust.org) (413) 628-4485 x 2



Nearing high water at the Historic Dam Trail in Williamsburg. Photo by David Weber.

## Weathering the Next Storm

**D**uring July's historic storms, communities throughout the Northeast watched as rivers and streams swelled, flowing into our homes and causing catastrophic damage to trails, roads, and farms.

The steep stream gradients and narrow valleys that put the "hill" in "Hilltowns" make our region particularly sensitive to flooding and erosion. Williamsburg, MA and other towns with an industrial past, locate main roads and infrastructure along waterways like the Mill River, magnifying their flood vulnerability as storms become more frequent and intense due to climate change.

**"July's flooding was almost like the river writing a letter of support."**

**– Gaby Immerman, HLT Board Member, on Williamsburg's \$682k flood resilience grant**

Last spring, the town of Williamsburg submitted a funding request to the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Program to plan for flood resilience throughout the Upper Mill River watershed. Just weeks after Governor Maura Healey visited Williamsburg to witness July's flood damage, the state awarded Williamsburg \$682,085 in project funding.

"July's flooding was almost like the river writing a letter of support," said HLT Board Member Gaby Immerman, who also chairs the Mill River Greenway Committee and is a member of the MVP working group. "It demonstrated why we need to do this work."

Land trusts are an important partner in flood resiliency planning. Land conservation helps reduce flooding from storms by conserving and restoring natural floodplains and forests that naturally absorb and hold water. As a partner in this project, Hilltown Land Trust will lead community engagement activities to elevate the conversation around flood vulnerability.

Work on this two-year project will begin this fall. In addition to public forums and educational workshops, the project will study hydrologic systems in the watershed. This work will help the community address increased precipitation events and mitigate against flooding vulnerability in the decades to come.

*To read more about local flood impacts and resilience, scan the QR code or visit [hilltownlandtrust.org/tag/fw2023newsletter](https://hilltownlandtrust.org/tag/fw2023newsletter)*



# Welcome Mariel, Sarah, and Katie!

This September, Hilltown Land Trust welcomed Mariel Hohmann, who will serve as our TerraCorps Land Stewardship Coordinator for 11 months. Sarah Welch, who served as HLT's TerraCorps member for two years, also recently joined our staff as Community Engagement Manager.

We chatted with Mariel and Sarah about their new roles.



**Q: Mariel, what are you most looking forward to in your TerraCorps term with HLT?**

**A:** In just a couple of weeks with HLT, I've found myself hiking alongside swarms of red efts, looking out over a hundred-foot-long beaver dam, accidentally stepping in fresh bear scat, and otherwise communing with various non-human friends of the Hilltowns. I can't wait to explore my surroundings and the flora and fauna I share them with.



**Q: Sarah, what brought you back to HLT as staff?**

**A:** I knew early on in my time as a TerraCorps member that HLT was a special place. This community, from our volunteers and supporters to our staff and TerraCorps members, has enriched my life deeply. I'm thrilled to keep tending to these beautiful hills, and to each other, together. Also, snacking on the raspberries that grow outside our office is a top-notch perk of working here.

## Katie Theoharides joins The Trustees as President and CEO

Our affiliate The Trustees recently named Katie Theoharides as its next President and CEO. Originally from western Massachusetts, Katie brings a background in ecology and climate science to her environmental and land conservation work.

Katie also shares a unique connection with Hilltown Land Trust: she served as our first-ever Executive Director back in 2010! We're excited for our two organizations to continue growing together.



▶ To read the full version of this and other articles, scan the QR code or visit [hilltownlandtrust.org/tag/fw23newsletter](https://hilltownlandtrust.org/tag/fw23newsletter)



## Volunteers make your local land trust stronger!

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

# A Lifetime of Conservation Leadership

This summer, dedicated conservationist Wil Hastings of Cummington, MA passed away. Wil helped shape a vibrant land conservation community in the Hilltowns through his passion for environmental issues and the beauty of our region.

Wil served on our Board from 1992 until 2012, serving as President for the last 17 years of his tenure. During his time, Wil oversaw the transition of HLT from an all-volunteer organization to a staffed organization, and helped forge our affiliation with The Trustees.

"The actions he took and the leadership he provided not only helped HLT survive, but grow dramatically in its work and impact," said current HLT Board President Rus Peotter at Wil's memorial service.

In a 2019 interview about his time with HLT, Wil said, "What I'm the happiest and proudest of is getting Sally to be the Executive Director and Marie Burkart the [now former] President, and I think they have done a terrific job."

Securing a healthy future for Hilltown Land Trust and the land we conserve was always a priority for Wil. He leaves behind a generous bequest, in addition to the legacy of Hilltown conservation he helped build during his lifetime.

"Creating estate-plan gifts for HLT that will help keep it active indefinitely after death is a way to help build a charitable earth-supporting legacy on local ground and with local trees," said Wil last year. "I find that indescribably satisfactory!"



Wil Hastings. Photo by J Beller.

**"The actions [Wil] took and the leadership he provided not only helped HLT survive, but grow dramatically in its work and impact."**

**– Rus Peotter, HLT Board President**

## **Green Legacy Circle members like Wil help conserve and care for land in the Hilltowns for future generations.**

Including Hilltown Land Trust in your plans makes a lasting difference for the hills you love. To learn more about how you can leave a green legacy for the Hilltowns, scan the QR code or visit [hilltownlandtrust.org/get-involved/green-legacy-circle](https://hilltownlandtrust.org/get-involved/green-legacy-circle).



## Hilltown Land Trust Board of Directors & Staff

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Susan McAllister, *Vice President* • Williamsburg  
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Paul Wetzel • Williamsburg

Sally Loomis, *Executive Director*  
Sarah Welch, *Community Engagement Manager*  
Tiffany Thibodeau, *Office Manager*

# Get your cozy on at the Gorge après Gorge!

Sun, Nov. 26, 9:30 & 10:30 am

Lace up your shoes and get ready for this year's Gorge après Gorge! Experience the gorgeous splendor of the East Branch trail along the Westfield River on November 26th at the Chesterfield Gorge. This family friendly 5k and fun walk happens every Sunday after Thanksgiving in Chesterfield. Come down to the Gorge for locally baked cookie medals for all, plus a community potluck, handmade hat prizes, and the coziest day ever, no matter the weather.



▶ For more information and to register, scan the QR code or visit:

[hilltownlandtrust.org/gorge-apres-gorge](https://hilltownlandtrust.org/gorge-apres-gorge)



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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