



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

NEWS  
**Spring/Summer  
2024**

CONSERVING AND STEWARDING  
**LAND THROUGH RELATIONSHIPS FOR THE BENEFIT OF ALL**  
IN THE HILLTOWNS SINCE 1986



# Conserving land, caring for water

*Photo by Bob Labrie @bob.labrie.photo*

**Resilient Mill  
River**

**Welcome Alli,  
Jess, & Juliette**

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





Sears Meadow. Photo and cover photo by Bob Labrie @bob.labrie.photo

## 160 Acres of Wetlands, Trails, & Glacial Boulders Conserved

A Smith professor, nuclear physicist, and passionate lover of the land, Margaret Waggoner always planned to conserve her 160 acres of forest, wetlands, and trails in Ashfield and Goshen. In February 2024, more than two years after Margaret's passing, Hilltown Land Trust permanently conserved these parcels through a Conservation Restriction.

"She loved her land," Margaret's close friend Melanie Lamere said. "She bought it for the purpose of conservation." Margaret knew the woods intimately. "She knew every rock, every boulder."

The title to the land and house will pass temporarily to Smith College, with the sale to a private buyer raising funds for the College. HLT will hold a conservation restriction on the land, and will work with Ashfield Trails on 2 miles of trails to be opened formally this summer.

The land's giant boulders, deposited by glaciers over 12,000 years ago, are its most striking trailside feature. Sears Meadow, seen through trees from the trail, is a large wetland partially conserved through the gift. Together with the upland forest covering most of the parcel, the wetland safeguards water quality, sediment capture, plant and wildlife habitat, and carbon storage – all important buffers against the effects of climate change.

**"I hope that it's utilized and people appreciate the beauty."  
- Melanie Lamere**

an extensive wetland identified as BioMap Core Habitat," said HLT executive director Sally Loomis. "We're grateful that Margaret left a legacy through conservation."

"She was very private in life, and very generous in death," said Melanie Lamere of Margaret and her gift. "It's a unique property – you won't find boulders like that anywhere else. The swamp is a unique piece of ecology. I hope that it's utilized and people appreciate the beauty."



One of many boulders dotting the land - Phil Pless of Ashfield Trails for scale.

# Planning for a Resilient Mill River

Last year, climate change-driven flooding wreaked havoc on homes, farms, roads, bridges, and livelihoods across the Northeast. In October, the town of Williamsburg embarked on a two-year **\$682,085 state Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness grant to study flood resilience in the Upper Mill River watershed**. As one of the project contractors, HLT is spearheading community engagement in Williamsburg and the surrounding Hilltowns in the watershed.

This MVP grant is an important piece of climate resilience planning in the Hilltowns. By incorporating local knowledge, this project will ensure more effective and equitable future infrastructure upgrades, flood interventions, land management, and conservation efforts.

## So far, our team has used this grant to:

- Map and model the Mill River and watershed
- Identify existing and potential floodwater storage
- Assess culverts and stormwater infrastructure
- Understand priorities & challenges facing town boards and committees
- Learn from the community
- Map landscape resilience, wildlife corridors, erosion, and carbon storage
- And more!

## What's coming up:

- Indigenous consultation and site visits with No Loose Braids
- Opportunities for public input through events and surveys
- Ways to connect and learn more about the project online

## What's our watershed?

All the land where rainfall, streams, and rivers eventually flow into the Mill River north of the Northampton line. (That's most of Williamsburg, plus parts of surrounding towns.)

## Ways to Engage

Join us as we plan for a safe, resilient Upper Mill River watershed!

### Climate Smart Landscapes at Home & Work

Through this practical workshop series, learn simple backyard interventions to reduce flood impacts. Save the date - details coming soon!

Saturdays 9-10:30 am @ Williamsburg Meekins Library

March 30, April 6, April 13, April 27, May 4

### Mill River Flood 150th Commemoration

Williamsburg & Leeds, Saturday May 18th

▶ To read more about flood resilience planning in the Upper Mill River watershed and take a land steward survey, scan the QR code or visit [hilltownlandtrust.org/tag/ss24newsletter](https://hilltownlandtrust.org/tag/ss24newsletter)

Survey!



The MVP team studying the Mill River in Williamsburg. Photo by Mark Costa.

# Welcome Alli, Jess, & Juliette!

This winter, we welcomed Alli Cwalinski as our Office Manager, Jess Applin as our Conservation and Stewardship Manager, and Juliette Gomes as our TerraCorps Community Engagement Coordinator. Get to know them below!



**Alli Cwalinski**  
Office Manager

↶ Favorite plants:  
Spring ephemerals,  
like trillium

**Alli:** I'll be supporting HLT in the role of Office Manager. I'm also looking forward to getting involved with HLT events!

After deciding to make a career change, I went back to school to study environmental conservation and restoration ecology. I'm especially passionate about our local wetlands and forests. Prior to HLT, I worked as a birth and postpartum doula and served as an assistant for a local midwifery practice. Most recently, I was an assistant project manager for a postdoctoral fellow at UMass researching bee foraging behaviors as a result of parasitic infection.

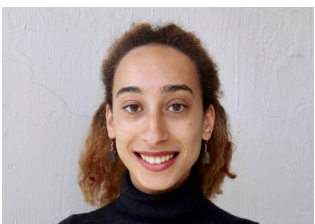


**Jess Applin**  
Conservation &  
Stewardship Manager

↶ Kayaker, tracker,  
and nature artist

**Jess:** I will help manage HLT's land conservation and land stewardship efforts. My first love in this field will always be the wildlife, and my passion for the work lies in landscape level wildlife habitat connectivity.

I came to land conservation through my experiences watching bears, foxes, and porcupines on a rural farm in Ashfield. The ease and peaceful nature of these animals as they interacted with the land was magical to me. I realized that this was how it was supposed to be for them, and that I wanted to be able to support that balance in any way I could.



**Juliette Gomes**  
TerraCorps Community  
Engagement Coordinator

↶ Avid potter (and  
mineral chemistry  
nerd)

**Juliette:** Through July 2024, I will be conducting outreach and creating monthly programs and events to increase inclusivity, accessibility, and public education of HLT's stewardship of conserved lands.

This past May, I graduated from Oberlin College where I studied geology and environmental studies. My previous experience is primarily in geochemistry and environmental justice related research, including analyzing and producing industrial air pollution maps with ArcGIS software. My other focus areas include community resiliency, engagement, and oral storytelling.

To read the full version of this and other articles, scan the QR code or visit [hilltownlandtrust.org/tag/ss23newsletter](https://hilltownlandtrust.org/tag/ss23newsletter)



# Volunteer Spotlight: Sarah LaPointe

**S**arah LaPointe of Williamsburg has been volunteering with Hilltown Land Trust since 2015, and serves an important role monitoring the trails at HLT's Breckenridge and Bradley properties. We caught up with Sarah to learn about why she loves caring for her local conserved trails.

## **Q: What's your connection to Bradley and Breckenridge?**

A: I've been hiking the Bradley and Breckenridge trails for many years, and am lucky enough to live near both of them!

## **Q: What do you do as a volunteer? How long have you cared for these trails?**

A: I've been a trail monitor at Breckenridge from 2015-2022 and at Bradley from 2016-present. I walk the trails and report any trees down, changes after flooding or storms, erosion, invasive plants and any other issues that might affect the property.

## **Q: Have you noticed changes to the landscape due to recent weather events?**

A: Yes, the storms are much more frequent and damaging. In the last couple of years, heavy rainfall has sometimes turned Nichols Brook into a raging flood that washes out areas of the trail alongside it.

## **Q: Is there a special moment you've had on the trails you'd like to share?**

A: I've seen tracks of many animals, including bears and moose! I've seen fox cubs, coyotes, barred and great horned owls, porcupines, mink and many others. One of my favorite encounters was watching a red eft and a snail slowly munching on a mushroom together!



*Sarah LaPointe at Bradley*

**"One of my favorite encounters was watching a red eft and a snail slowly munching on a mushroom together!"**

## **Volunteers make your local land trust stronger!**

From trail work to committee service (and everything in between), local land conservation happens because of you.

Want to get involved? We'd love to have you! Fill out an easy volunteer interest form by scanning the QR code, or visit [hilltownlandtrust.org/get-involved/volunteer-with-hlt](https://hilltownlandtrust.org/get-involved/volunteer-with-hlt)



## **Hilltown Land Trust Board of Directors & Staff**

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Alli Cwalinski, *Office Manager*  
Sarah Welch, *Community Engagement Manager*

# Give Back TO THE LAND

**Tuesday, April 16th**

**GiveBackToTheLand.org**

We're teaming up again with neighboring land trusts to raise money for vital local land conservation.

**Will you join us?**

**L**and lovers from across the region and beyond are supporting 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 \$16,000 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 to make your gift before midnight on April 16th.**

**Early giving starts Saturday, April 13th.**



**Have you visited one of our trails recently?**

We want to hear your trail tales! [ContactUs@HilltownLandTrust.org](mailto:ContactUs@HilltownLandTrust.org)

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