

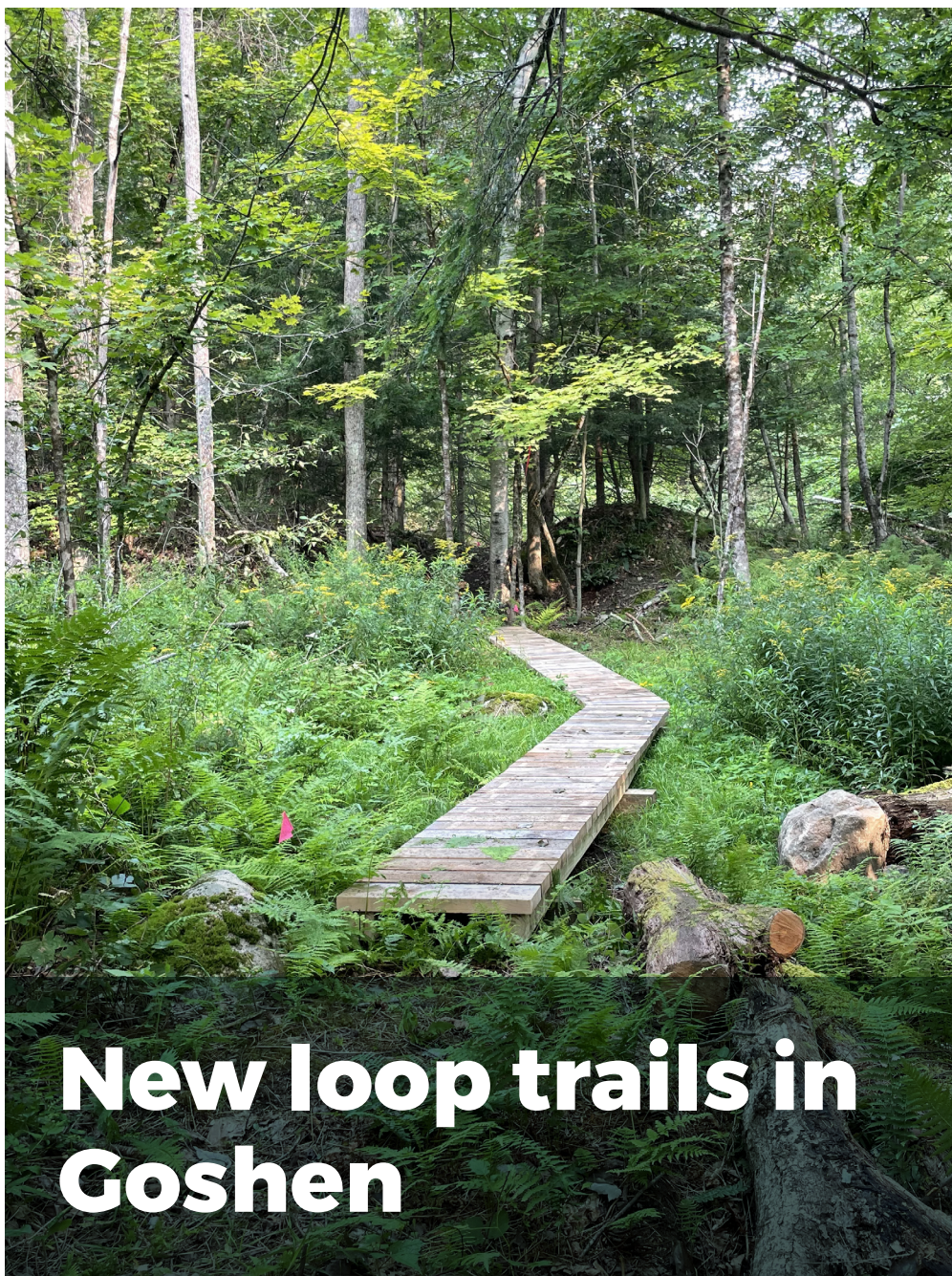


# Hilltown Land Trust

AN AFFILIATE OF THE TRUSTEES

NEWS  
Spring/Summer  
2025

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



## New loop trails in Goshen

Inside a  
vernal pool

HLT's new  
president

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





Volunteer Dave Weber puts the finishing touch on one of several stone stairways on the Ledges Trail

# Team Effort

How 29 volunteers made Goshen's Clary Hill trails worth visiting again and again



**T**wo and a half miles of new loop trails at Clary Hill in Goshen will open to the public on April 26th, 2025 thanks to a widespread volunteer effort.

The Sofinowski family bequeathed the 132 forested acres to HLT in 2023, specifying that the land be opened to the public for hiking and recreation. The new trails link Williamsburg's Briar Hill trails with the DAR State Forest.

"The trail network features a flower-filled meadow, former pastures, rocky outcrops, lush wetlands, and many forest types, including a gorgeous oak-hickory glade with a carpet of sedge," said HLT TerraCorps member Mariel Hohmann.

Nearly thirty volunteers from the Williamsburg Woodland Trails Committee, UMass, Ashfield Trails, and HLT spent a combined seven hundred hours building the trails.

"From design, to building bridges, hauling rocks, cutting a treadway with heavy tools, everything about these trails was volunteer-led," said Mariel, who coordinated volunteer efforts.

Dave Weber of Williamsburg Woodland Trails poured roughly five hundred hours into designing and building trails at Clary Hill, including the several stonework features. Drawing on his background in sustainable landscape design, Dave helped plan a network of durable trails that will withstand foot traffic and erosion while offering hikers a comfortable and enjoyable experience.

"There haven't been many opportunities for Williamsburg Woodland Trails to make brand new trails," said Dave, who scouted the land with HLT for nine months prior to trail work. "It's not often that many seasons can inform a trail design."

Clary Hill is HLT's third new public trail in recent years. The land trust seeks to balance public recreation with other responsible land stewardship practices.

"We came to a good balance of where not to put trails," said Dave, who is eager for potential future trail connections while leaving room for wildlife. "There are places left outside of the human pathway. It's one of the reasons why we see wildlife sign out there all the time. They seem to love the place as much as we do."

**"From design, to building bridges and hauling rocks, everything about these trails was volunteer-led."**

— Mariel Hohmann

## TEAM EFFORT

Support for stewardship of Clary Hill comes in part from a major anonymous grant, matched by donations from HLT members.



Mariel Hohmann installing wildlife habitat signage

“Thanks to our donors, we can confidently take on the long-term care responsibilities of a place like Clary Hill,” said HLT Executive Director Sally Loomis.

“Walking at Clary Hill is a journey through a varied landscape that changes with every season,” said Mariel. “I hope that people experience something new every time they visit.”

▶ To read more about Clary Hill and the grand opening hike, visit [hilltownlandtrust.org/tag/ss25newsletter](https://hilltownlandtrust.org/tag/ss25newsletter)

## Clary Hill Grand Opening Hike

Sat. April 26, 1 PM | Briar Hill Rd, Goshen

- RSVP optional
- Info & directions online

## Federal Funding and HLT

**B**ecause most of our conservation, stewardship, and community work is not contingent on federal funding, we expect to experience the effects of executive orders more indirectly and over the long term. We're doing our best to brace for possible changes, especially to the TerraCorps service program.

Our efforts to build just relationships of care with the land and with each other will continue regardless of federal policy or other challenges. Hilltown Land Trust remains committed to our mission of conserving and stewarding land through relationships for the benefit of all.

**We won't compromise on our values**

## What's Up With Vernal Pools?

By Mariel Hohmann, TerraCorps

**A**s snowmelt and rainy days fill the vernal pools of the Hilltowns, salamanders, frogs, and fairy shrimp are on the move. And so is HLT!

This winter, we hosted a reunion for our Vernal Pool Plunge trainees to reconnect, celebrate their accomplishments, and look to the future.

Going forward, we're banding together to conserve more vernal pools and educate more folks about them. Head to the Vernal Pool Plunge

page on our website to learn more and keep an eye out for these fragile environments in your area!

▶ To find out more about vernal pools and how you can help protect them, visit [hilltownlandtrust.org/tag/ss25newsletter](https://hilltownlandtrust.org/tag/ss25newsletter)





*Tariq Abu-Jaber,  
Williamsburg*



*Tiffany Thibodeau,  
Worthington*

## Our Board is Growing

**H**illtown Land Trust welcomes two new members to its Board of Directors.

**Tariq Abu-Jaber** is a member of his town's Planning Board, and previously served on the board of Mass Audubon's Broadmoor Sanctuary.

**Tiffany Thibodeau** was HLT's first Office Manager before pivoting full-time to providing grants consulting in service STEM education, youth workforce development, and college access. She serves on her town's Conservation Commission.

Tariq and Tiffany will both continue to serve on HLT's Stewardship Committee in addition to their new board roles. We're excited for them to bring their expertise to our conservation mission!

▶ *The HLT board has openings for new members. To learn more, email:*

**ContactUs@HilltownLandTrust.Org**

## Welcome Back, Wendy

**W**endy Sweetser Ferris has returned to HLT's affiliate The Trustees as vice president for the Central and Valley region. Wendy will help our affiliated organizations build a stronger conservation community in the Hilltowns.

"I'm thrilled to be back at the Trustees helping conserve and steward vital places in this special region," said Wendy.

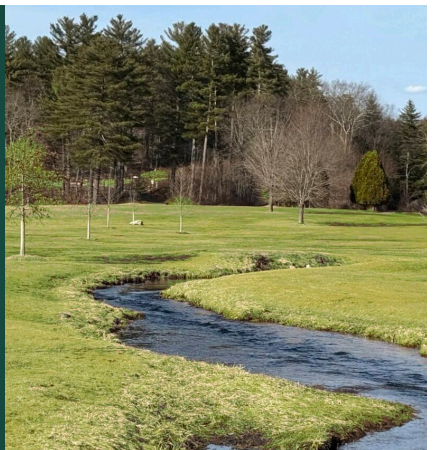
From 2002 to 2012, Wendy worked at our Bullitt Reservation offices in Ashfield as the director of The Trustees' Highland Communities Initiative. We're delighted to have her back in the Hilltowns!



*Wendy Sweetser Ferris*

## Rewilding Beaver Brook

Want to hear more about the conservation of Beaver Brook Golf Course in Haydenville? Come to a virtual info session on April 16th, a tour of the site on May 15th, or visit [thetrustees.org/beaverbrook](https://thetrustees.org/beaverbrook) to learn more.



**Read the full versions of these articles and more at:  
[HilltownLandTrust.org/announcements](https://HilltownLandTrust.org/announcements)**



# Letter from our New President



*Susan McAllister, Board President*

When our former president Rus Peotter retired after twelve years of board service, our longtime vice president Susan McAllister of Williamsburg stepped up to lead our board. Rus, who served as president for four years, will continue in an advisory role.

I grew up in the Rocky Mountains before the Endangered Species Act. There were only approximately 450 nesting pairs of bald eagles and fewer than 1000 grizzly bears remaining in the lower 48. Wolves were largely eradicated from the landscape, and bird species were in serious decline.

Things have improved since then, yet we continue to lose species due to habitat loss and degradation. Here in western Massachusetts, salamanders, turtles, butterflies, moths, bees, and dozens of birds and bats are continuing to decline.

Species recovery requires not just saving habitats, but also forming lasting partnerships with the people who share those habitats. All people benefit from the preservation of the natural world, and not only have a right to be included in conversation but are vital for success.

Here in western Massachusetts, we still have large tracts of forested landscapes that are vital for clean water supplies, wildlife habitat, biodiversity, and recreation. Yet, development pressures threaten to fragment and disrupt both these landscapes and our local farming communities.

From my first days volunteering for Hilltown Land Trust, I was impressed with how knowledgeable, professional, and dedicated the people of HLT are. With our expanded growth in staff this past year, we are now able to protect more land, partner with others on larger projects, and to do so at a quicker pace.

Covid forced me to stay home and explore my own backyard. In the process I fell in love with our landscapes and I want to see them conserved for the benefit of both wildlife and people. I love that HLT is local, I love the mission and values, and I couldn't feel more honored to be a part of the journey.

**Species recovery requires not just saving habitats, but also forming lasting partnerships with the people who share those habitats.**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan McAllister". The signature is fluid and cursive.

*Susan McAllister, Board President*



*Rus Peotter, former President*

## **Hilltown species need support from the people who share their habitats.**

You can help us sustain a vibrant Hilltown community with a gift to Hilltown Land Trust. Renew your membership or make an additional gift by visiting [hilltownlandtrust.org/donate](https://hilltownlandtrust.org/donate)



# Give Back TO THE LAND

**Tuesday, April 22nd**

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

Our goal? Raising \$20,000 to give back to the land that gives so much to all of us.

***Will you join us?***

**Visit [GiveBackToTheLand.org](http://GiveBackToTheLand.org) to make your gift before midnight on April 22nd.**

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