

# 2014 Annual Report



## What We Accomplished

**Highlights** - RI Land Trust Council had another very successful year in 2014:

- ✓ **Hosted the 2014 national land conservation conference “Rally”** in September and showcased the Council and the state’s land trust accomplishments for a national and international audience of nearly 2000 land conservation leaders.
- ✓ **11<sup>th</sup> consecutive year of successful state policy advocacy:**
  - **State’s open space bond was approved by over 71% of Rhode Island voters** – more than any other initiative or candidate on the ballot. The \$53 million “Clean Water, Open Space and Healthy Communities Bond” provides funding for farmland conservation and land conservation for municipal parks.
  - **The State adopted a new Economic Development Plan documents the importance of land conservation and sustaining agriculture to the state’s economy.**
- ✓ **Initiated SWAT Teams of trained volunteers to help land trusts with stewardship.** The first teams are focused on helping land trusts **map trails, blaze trails, and prepare baseline documents.**
- ✓ **Initiated a Circuit Rider Program to help land trusts prepared baseline documents** for their protected lands.
- ✓ **Sponsored Land Trust Days, now in its 3<sup>rd</sup> year, to increase the visibility of land trusts and the special places they are protecting.** 33 land trusts and partners organized 54 activities in communities across the state over 7 weeks. Over 3,393 people participated in land trust day activities including 2200 in 3 community festivals and 1193 participating in 39 walks (an average of over 31 people per walk.)
- ✓ **Helped more land trusts map their trails and post their trail maps on ExploreRI.org.** The website now has **trail maps and information for more than 50 land trust trail networks** so that more people can locate these trails and find information for trails on many land trust properties on one website. ExploreRI is becoming the “go to” website for information on walking trails (as it already is for information about places to kayak or canoe).
- ✓ **2014 Land & Water Conservation Summit, organized in partnership with peers from watershed organizations and conservation commissions, had capacity attendance, 27 workshops, and a keynote address on the importance of green infrastructure to our communities and economic development.**
- ✓ **Land Trust Excellence Project** (a partnership with Land Trust Alliance) continues **providing consulting support and helping several land trusts improve their standards and practices.**
- ✓ In progress: the Council is developing a **website where land trusts can file baseline documents** for the lands they protect and a **“Monitoring protocol” and checklist to help land trusts monitor their protected lands.**

### National Land Trust Conference – “Rally” - Held in Rhode Island

- The National Land Conservation Conference - “Rally” - was held in Providence Wednesday, September 17 through Saturday, September 20 and attended by nearly 2000 land trust leaders from around the nation and world. Rally showcased the RI Land Trust Council and the state’s land trusts’ accomplishments. Highlights included:
  - RI Land Trust Council hosted a welcome reception for people arriving on Wednesday that was attended by several hundred people.
  - 7 field trips, led by Rhode Island land trusts on Wednesday and Thursday, were booked to capacity and received rave reviews.
  - RI Land Trust Council initiated and organized a half-day Special Feature Session for “All Volunteer Land Trusts” on Saturday. This was the first time that a Rally workshop was developed specifically for leaders from all-volunteer land trusts.
  - RI Land Trust Council’s display table at Rally was visited by a constant stream of land conservation leaders. The display table was also the gathering spot where Rhode Islanders attending Rally connected with each other.
  - RI Land Trust Council wrote an op-ed about the economic importance of land conservation to the state that was prominently published during Rally in the Providence Journal, Newport Daily News and many regional newspapers.
  - Rhode Island’s land trust leaders (including RI Land Trust Council Board members) led several workshops at Rally.

### State Legislative & Policy Work

- The Council is the land trust community’s voice at the Statehouse and in state policy discussions. We pursue legislation and state policy that supports land trusts and land conservation and that defends our land conservation accomplishments.

#### **Legislation**

- **Legislation Defending Protected Lands.** In early 2014 the Council worked with the Attorney General’s office to draft conservation defense legislation that was introduced in the RI General Assembly. The legislation increases penalties for “encroachment on protected lands” with the goal of deterring tree cutting, stone wall theft, and other willful damage to protected lands. Current penalties are little more than a hand slap and little deterrent. The legislation is patterned after a very successful law in Connecticut. Unfortunately, this legislation was not approved by the General Assembly in 2014 and is being reintroduced in 2015. *Thank you to the legislative sponsors Senator Sosnowski (2014 & 2015), Representative Walsh(2014), and Representative Lally (2015).*
- **2014 RI Open Space Bond Funding for Land Conservation.** Governor Chafee proposed a \$75 million Clean Water, Open Space and Healthy Communities Bond which included funding for land conservation. The Council led advocacy for the Bond and issued an action alert to land trust leaders and friends when the RI General Assembly eliminated funding for local open space grants from the Bond.
  - A \$53 million Bond was approved by the RI General Assembly and placed on the November 2014 ballot for voter approval. It included \$3 million for farmland protection & \$4 million for grants to municipalities for park acquisition & development.
  - Rhode Island voters overwhelmingly supported this bond with over 71% approval statewide and the approval by the majority of voters in every municipality. In fact, the Clean Water, Open Space and Health Communities Bond had the highest voter approval for any decision on the 2014 ballot (referendums and candidates). And the percentage of voters who approved the 2014 open space bond increased in 24 communities from votes to approve open space bonds in 2010 and 2012.

- **Safeguarding Protected Lands from Damaging Legislation.** The Council keeps a watchful eye out for other legislation that could be detrimental to protected lands and land trusts. The Council testifies at hearings and works with sponsors of this legislation to safeguard land conservation and land trust interests.

### **Rhode Island Economic Development Plan**

- RI Land Trust Council and several land trust leaders participated in many meetings that Rhode Island Division of Planning held to develop a new Economic Development Plan for the state. The Council and Burrillville Land Trust testified at 2 hearings on the draft plan in October. In response to this testimony on the Draft Plan, the Plan was significantly revised and **adopted with language that documents the important role of land conservation to the state's economy.**

- **Agriculture Conservation - the Council continues working on initiatives to improve farm conservation policies and practices.** These efforts build on the recommendations from the forum we held in February 2010: *FarmRI 2.0 – Crafting the next generation of farm conservation strategies* as well as the Council's involvement in state and regional initiatives advancing agriculture sustainability.

### **Additional Highlights of Council Initiatives: Networking, Capacity Building & Resources**

- **11<sup>th</sup> Land & Conservation Water Summit** - our signature event of the year - held March 8, 2014 at the University of Rhode Island Memorial Union - offered 27 workshops and was attended by over 335 people – record attendance.
  - Keynote Speaker: Alvaro Sanchez Sanchez from *Green for All*. His talk, “**Building Strong green economies Using Land and Water Conservation Strategies**” discussed how green infrastructure provides economic, social and environmental benefits for our communities. He shared promising models for protecting the environment while strengthening communities' economies and creating jobs.
  - **Presentation of RI Land Trusts' 2013 Top Accomplishments** - Paul Roselli (Council Board Member & Burrillville Land Trust President) once again gave an inspiring report at the Council's Annual meeting. The collective impact of land trusts across the state is incredible.
- **Stewardship “SWAT” Teams** – In 2014, the Council initiated SWAT Teams - small teams of volunteers who are helping land trusts with stewardship tasks. The initial SWAT Teams are: trail mapping map and blazing (so that trails are easier to follow). We are starting another SWAT team (in coordination with the Council's Circuit Rider Program for Baseline Documents) to help land trusts prepare baseline documents for their protected lands. The SWAT Team initiative is in partnership with RI Master Gardeners.

In 2014, the Council held field workshops on:

- Trail Mapping & Trail Blazing – Saturday, April 12
- Preparing Baseline Documents – Saturday, October 25

In 2014, the trail mapping and blazing SWAT team helped Smithfield Land Trust create trail maps and blaze trails for 2 properties: Wolf Hill and Olivia's Forest. This team also created a trail map for one Narrow River Land Trust property: Garrison House Acres. These trail maps are now posted on ExploreRI.org. These SWAT team volunteers also began working with Cumberland Land Trust, North Smithfield Land Trust, Foster Land Trust and Smithfield Land Trust to create trail maps and blaze trails.

- **Circuit Rider Program Established to Help Land Trusts Prepare Baseline Documents.**  
The Council has contracted with a consultant to work as a “circuit rider” helping land trusts prepare baseline documents for lands they have protected. The Circuit Rider is available to advise land trusts and coach them so that they can learn to prepare their own baseline documents. The Circuit Rider will also help some land trusts prepare baseline documents and will help to coordinate SWAT team volunteers who can help land trusts prepare baseline documents. The Circuit Rider program was initiated by the Council’s Land Trust Excellence Committee and is funded in part by a grant from the Rhode Island Foundation.
- **Website Filing System for Land Trusts’ Baseline Documents** – the Council is working with a consultant to develop a website where land trusts can file baseline documents and other core documents for properties they are protecting. This website will ensure that land trusts are always able to locate the baseline documents for their protected lands. This system will help the state’s land trusts maintain these files that are critical for defending their protected lands and will be especially helpful for land trusts that do not have an office. Funding for development of this website filing system was provided by a grant from the Conservation Stewardship Collaborative Fund at the Rhode Island Foundation.
- Developing a **Monitoring Protocol and Checklist for Monitoring Protected Lands** – Nationally recognized best practices require monitoring of protected land at least once a year. The Council is contracting with a consultant to develop guidance (a protocol) and a checklist that land trusts can use to monitor their protected lands. This project is building on the work of the RI Conservation Stewardship Collaborative which developed a protocol for preparing baseline documents and management plans for protected lands. This project is funded by a grant from the Conservation Stewardship Collaborative Endowment at the RI Foundation.
- **Land Trust Days** – held for the third year - August 8 through September 28 - was a great success! The purpose of Land Trust Days is to:
  - **increase the visibility of land trusts and the special places that they are protecting** in communities across the state; and
  - **encourage people to get outdoors** and enjoy the protected land in their communities.
  - The theme for Land Trust Days was: “**Discover your true nature.**”
  - 33 land conservation organizations participated and hosted 54 activities during 7 weeks.
  - The Council worked with Worldways Social Marketing to promote Land Trust Days events and we significantly increased the use of social media: Facebook, MeetUp, Twitter, and Pinterest.
  - The Council sponsored Rhode Island Public Radio to increase visibility of land trusts and Land Trust Days.
  - The Council printed Land Trust Days t-shirts.

Outcomes:

- Front page coverage of Land Trust Days in the Providence Journal and prominent coverage in many other local newspapers and in ecoRI.
- Over 3,393 people participated in land trust day activities including 2200 in 3 community festivals (Tiverton Land Trust, West Greenwich Land Trust, Aquidneck Land Trust outdoor film screening); 1193 participated in 39 walks and other “small” activities such as storytelling which was an average of over 31 people for each event (based on evaluations from 28 of 37 organizations which hosted Land Trust Day events.)
- The Council is continuing MeetUp and Facebook postings for land trust events all year round. This enables land trusts to increase the visibility for all of their activities.

Partial funding for Land Trust Days was provided by a RI Department of Environmental Management Trail Grant. Worldways Social Marketing provided significant in-kind support as well as funding for some advertising on MeetUp and Facebook.

- **Land Trust Trails on ExploreRI.org website** – is an initiative to increase public awareness and use of land trusts’ trails. RI Land Trust Council’s goal is to get all the trails on every land trust property mapped and posted on one website so that they are easy for people to find and enjoy. We already have over 50 land trust trail networks posted.

Thanks to the Blueways Alliance, which developed ExploreRI.org, this is the “go to” website for information about places to go paddling in Rhode Island. RI Land Trust Council wants it to also become the “go to” website for information about walking trails in the state. Partial funding for the Council’s trail map initiative was provided by a grant from the Conservation Stewardship Collaborative Endowment at the RI Foundation and a RIDEM Trail Grant.

- **Websites with Resource Information** - RI Land Trust Council Website - [www.RILandTrusts.org](http://www.RILandTrusts.org) - continues to be expanded and additional information added. The site provides information about the Council and provides links to: land trusts around the state; our agriculture videos and reports; a video of our Baseline Documentation workshop, and other resource information. In addition, the Council is a lead partner of Rhode Island Land & Water Partnership which maintains a companion website: [www.landandwaterpartnership.org](http://www.landandwaterpartnership.org) with an **on-line stewardship library**. As previously mentioned, the Council is also a partner of the ExploreRI.org website for trail information.

- **Land Trust Excellence Project** [a partnership with the National Land Trust Alliance (Alliance)] - RI Land Trust Council and the Alliance are working together to help land trusts across the state implement Standards and Practices – the nationally recognized best practices for land conservation. In 2014, we continued to provide consulting support to several land trusts (Barrington, Cumberland, Foster, Glocester, Land Conservancy of North Kingstown and Narrow River Land Trust) to help them implement their priority Standards and Practices. In 2014, the Land Trust Excellence Project initiated the Circuit Rider project to help land trusts prepare baseline documents for their protected lands. Partial funding for this initiative is being provided by a Rhode Island Foundation Strategy Grant.

- **Coalitions & Representing Land Trusts in Statewide Forums** - The Council continues to **represent the state’s land trust community in statewide** coalitions, partnerships and policy discussions so that land trusts’ interests are included in decisions and initiatives.

- **Conservation Stewardship Collaborative (CSC)** - The Council represents the land trust community as one of 7 members of this coalition. The CSC is working to improve stewardship of Rhode Island’s protected lands and is supported by an endowment at the Rhode Island Foundation established by the Sharpe Family. **CSC initiatives benefit land trusts and their stewardship work.** Specifically, CSC gave grants in 2013 and 2014 for:
  - the Council’s state policy work;
  - developing a monitoring protocol and checklist for land trusts;
  - developing web based system where land trusts can file back-up copies of their baseline documents for protected lands;
  - initiating SWAT Teams, volunteer teams to help land trusts with stewardship activities including mapping blazing their trails and preparing baseline documentation reports;
  - refreshing the online resource library on the Land & Water Partnership website;
  - initiating a course at URI training students to prepare baseline documentation reports; and
  - sponsoring the Land & Water Conservation Summit.

See the CSC website for details of projects funded: [www.ricsc.org](http://www.ricsc.org)

- **Land Trust E-news** - the Council continues to promote networking and communications among land trusts with a periodic e-news and action alerts. Additional emails are sent to leaders of each land trust (presidents, chairs and executive directors).

## **How We Accomplished this: Grants & Funding Support**

The RI Land Trust Council's work is made possible by the contribution of **100s of hours of volunteer time and expertise by the Council's Board members and land trust leaders** from across the state. The Council's work is funded by generous contributions from land trusts (our members), foundations and other organizations and individuals.

**We appreciate this support that makes our work possible!**

### **Land Trusts Supporting RI Land Trust Council in 2014**

**\*\* Land Trusts that increased their support in 2014 above their 2013 dues contribution**

- Aquidneck Land Trust
- Audubon Society of Rhode Island
- Barrington Land Conservation Trust
- Block Island Conservancy
- Block Island Land Trust
- Bristol Land Conservation Trust
- Burrillville Land Trust
- Charlestown Land Trust
- Cumberland Land Trust\*\*
- East Greenwich Land Trust
- Foster Land Trust
- Gloucester Land Trust
- Hopkinton Land Trust
- Land Conservancy of North Kingstown
- Little Compton Ag. Conservancy Trust
- Mount Tom Land Trust\*\*
- North Smithfield Land Trust
- Narrow River Land Trust\*\*
- Neutaconkanut Hill Conservancy\*\*
- Prudence Conservancy
- RI Farm Bureau Land Trust
- Richmond Rural Preservation Land Trust
- Sakonnet Preservation Association\*\*
- Scituate Land Trust\*\*
- Smithfield Land Trust
- South Kingstown Land Trust\*\*
- Southside Community Land Trust
- Tiverton Land Trust
- Tiverton Open Space Commission
- Watch Hill Conservancy
- Weekapaug Foundation for Conservation
- West Bay Land Trust\*\*
- West Greenwich Land Trust
- The Westerly Land Trust

### **Grants & Major Donations**

**Thank you** to these foundations, organizations and individuals for their generous contributions to the RI Land Trust Council in support of land conservation and land trusts' work across the state:

**The Rhode Island Foundation**

**Conservation Stewardship Collaborative Endowment @ The RI Foundation**

**van Beuren Charitable Foundation**

**Prince Charitable Trusts**

**Sharpe Family Foundation/Julie & Henry Sharpe III**

**Aquidneck Land Trust**

**Hazard Family Foundation**

**Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Woodcock**

**RI Department of Environmental Management Trail Grant**

**Worldways Social Marketing**

**Anonymous contribution**

**Board Members (current & former) of RI Land Trust Council**

**Thank YOU for supporting the RI Land Trust Council's Work!**

*Jane Baumann*, President

*Rupert Friday*, Executive Director